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THROUGH JOHN'S EYES

HUNTLY ROBERTSON



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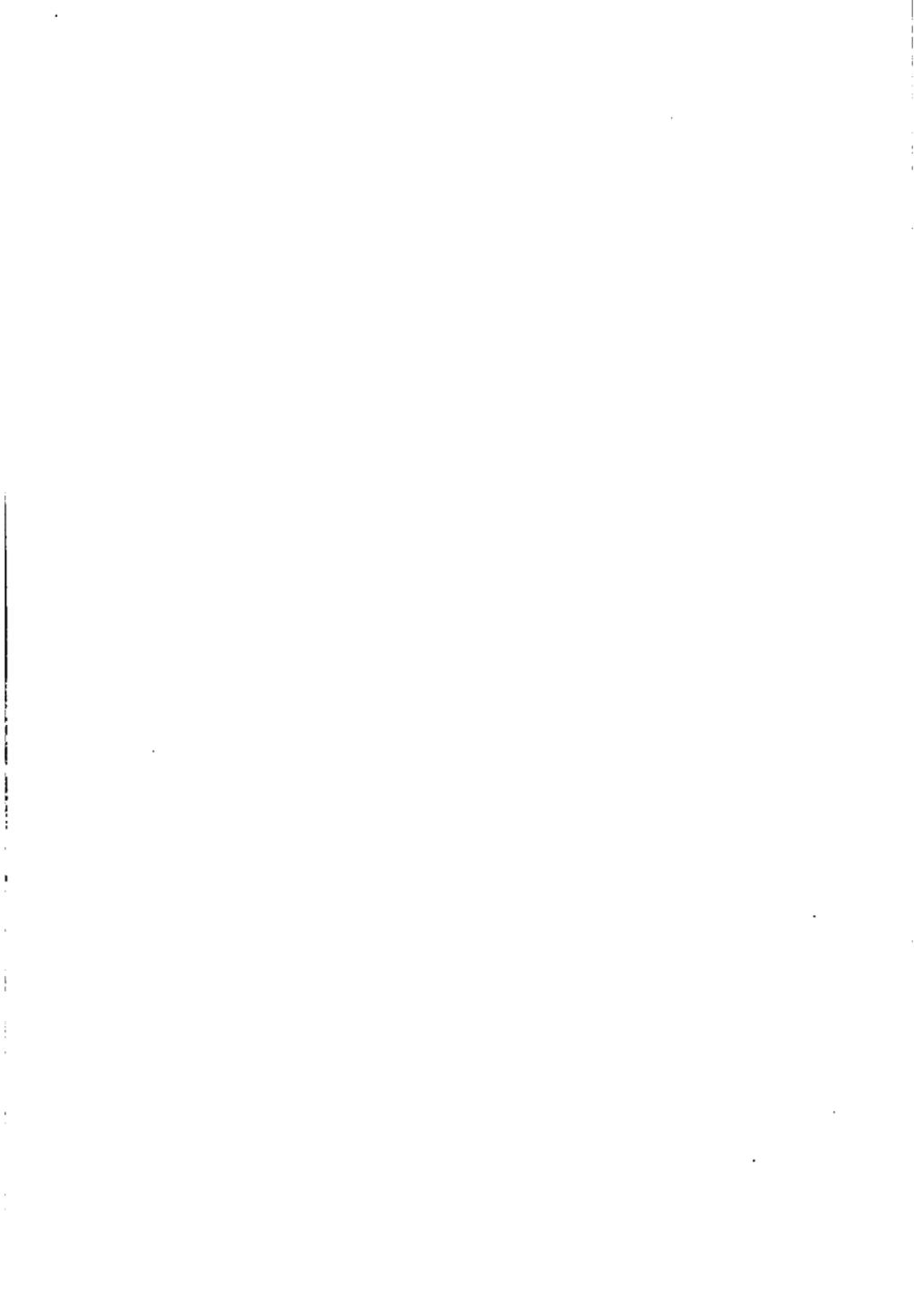
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THROUGH JOHN'S EYES

HUNTLY ROBERTSON

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BY
HUNTLY ROBERTSON



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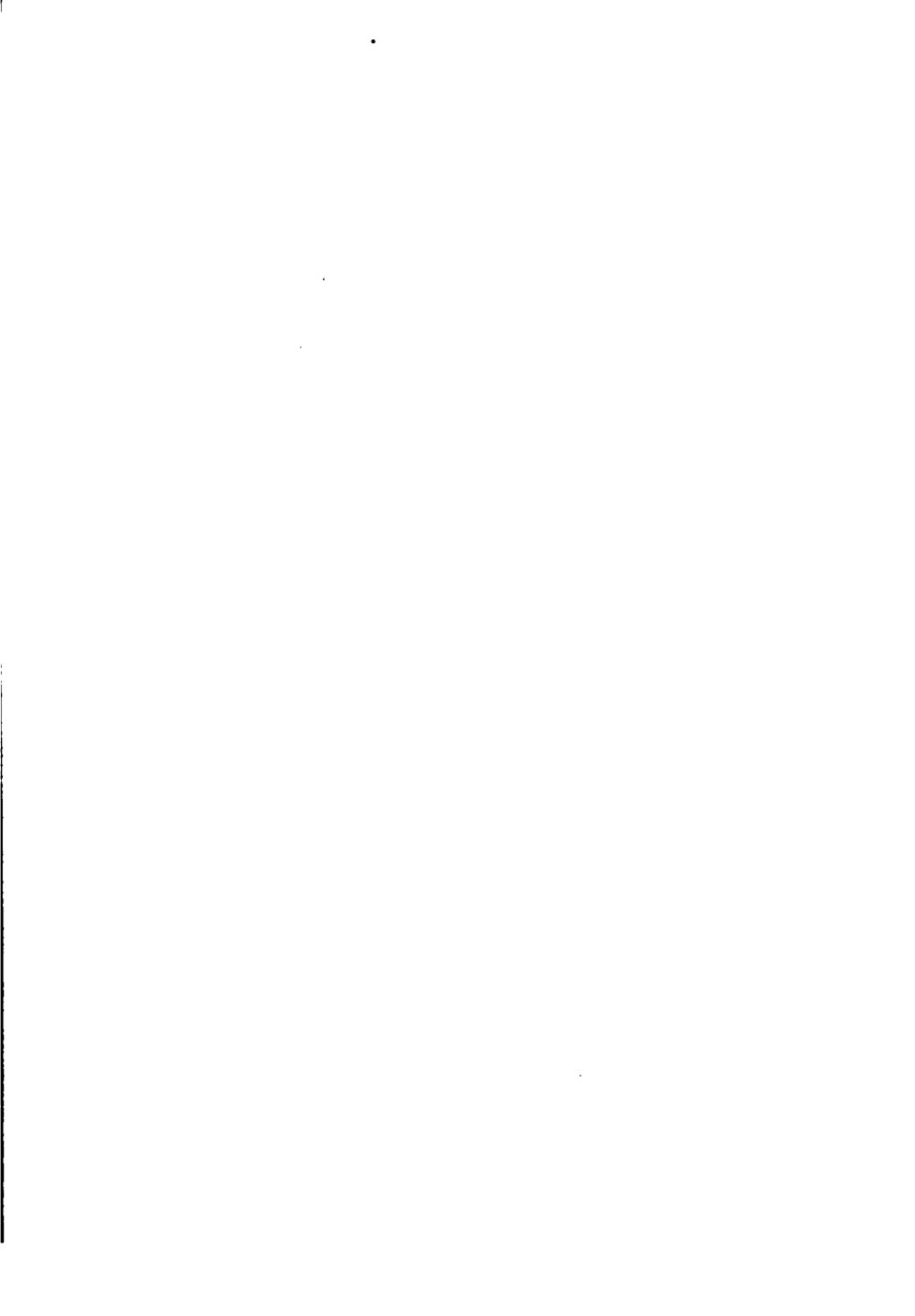
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PART ONE: SCOTLAND

1

THROUGH JOHN'S EYES

PART ONE: SCOTLAND

I

. . . a girl with red hair swishing a stick swish swish.
What's the stick Jessay? It's a nash stick Eila. Is it a
nash stick? Did she cut it off a nash tree? Did she
cut it off of our ash tree? The dog ran out after the
girl. There were pebbles flying. One flew into the cart.

He remembered the pebble flying into the cart.

It was hot. He did not like the hot when you got
to the uphill. Jessay would say "Oosh" and push.

Eila pushed the cart and it went down the steps.
There were balls on the steps and a little feathery ferny.

And someone said "You're three to-day."

II

WHEN he went in the train he knew that he had been in it before, and that there had been a china dog sitting on the window-sill. And there was *Victoria station so big and so fair*. And when he went to Granny's and saw the bead screen in the hall he knew that he had seen it before—beads jingling and somebody tall coming out and laughing. And he knew that he had been in the dining-room before and that Ilay had put his napkin ring in his eye, and somebody had told him not to. Jessie did not believe it. He wanted to go out and find the person; somebody in brown. Then Jessie would believe.

Jessie put coal on the fire. It made a noise on and on and on, and every time he thought it was the last time. Then she took the coal-box and threw the coal about. He could not paint while she was doing it. After that he and Ilay had to go upstairs. He hated going upstairs; people bothering. And soon after he hated Ilay. Only Granny said they had been good boys and they were to come into the drawing-room. Granny sang songs in the drawing-room. Giles Collins looked out from his wind-oh, and they died, and there was a spire and rose-trees. The big screen had a little window and they used to rush to the little window to see Simmy coming in with the tray. It was a brass tray.

He and Ilay stayed in the library most of the time. The chairs were queer, yellow wood with round backs, and sometimes they were nice and sometimes he could

not bear them. You tucked your napkin up, and skin on the cocoa. Ilay took the skin off with his finger; it did not make John feel sick, only the milk skin. They had tea in the library and for a long time there was a joke that happened every day. When Jessie poured out the tea from the black teapot someone would say, "The tea pot is *hot*." It was very funny and they always laughed, only after a time John could not stand the feeling of having to wait for it, knowing it must happen. He tried counting twenty but it made him too nervous.

He often counted twenty. Sometimes he did it before Jessie took the lid of the teapot off after grace, to see what would happen. Nothing ever did happen because he never got there. If he had, he might have begun being a baby again and live through all everything twice.

Jessie would go out and talk to Simpson outside. Once they both screamed with laughter, only in a whisper. He could hear them whispering and gasping and catching their breath. Then Mummy came out and shut the drawing-room door and went clack, clack across the hall. It was a tiled hall.

They played horses in the hall sometimes when little children came to tea. It was a silly game. Ilay had some red reins with bells. But the little girl with dark hair was not allowed to play. John asked, "Why not?" and Pringle said, "Because I'm afraid of her being sick, dear; she's been sick so many times this week."

He thought this over. He said to Pringle, "I've not been sick."

She said, "Lucky little boy. That's what comes of being a strong little boy. You *are* a lucky little boy."

He moved coldly away. He did not like Pringle any

more. But he was glad he had not been sick a great many times that week.

He used to look at pictures. There were pictures in the bound volume of *Little Folks* at the bottom of the book-shelves. He called them bound volumes. He knew that was right because Mummy had called them that.

There were pictures of little boys sliding and little girls playing with kittens. It was dull. Instead he used to look at the words and pretend he was Ilay reading. Then suddenly he could read the words themselves; and one day he had read a story. It was called *May's Birthday*, and in it was the first sentence he ever knew. "She had a toy lamb from her mother and a cart from her father." He could see these words when he shut his eyes, and he could remember the jump when he made them make sense. It was all rather wicked. He thought if he waited a little time perhaps he would not be able to read again, and then he would tell Jessie all about it. But whenever he opened a book, he could always read it. If Jessie suddenly came into the room he would turn over the pages and sing to himself as he studied a picture very carefully. He always remembered a horrid little girl tying a blue ribbon round a cat's neck, because the book fell open at that page, and he would stare at her stupid face—"Here's my Pussy"—while Jessie fumbled about, doing this and that. She never noticed anything.

Books showed that there were all sorts of people he had never heard of before. They were very interesting. There was a story with lots of boys in it, but the two he liked best were Noel and Jim. They did not talk to John but to each other and the other boys,

and John stood aside and looked and listened, astonishing Ilay and Jessie.

When he was not reading they went out for walks; and one day they went to the station for their morning walk, something about a parcel, John had not bothered to listen to what Granny was saying while they ran about the gravel drive and Jessie stood on the steps being told what to do. But it was something to do with the Office and talking over a counter to a very tall man. Ilay was looking at the book-stall, so John could not do that: he went into the waiting-room. There was a fire, and he warmed one foot against the bars.

A lady who was sitting there said, "Cold?"

He had a sudden idea. He did not look at the lady as he said it. "My name's Noel Macdonald."

"What a nice name," the lady said.

John was shy and ran out. He stood on the edge of the platform, balancing himself on his heels, full of content. The lady was believing that his name was Noel Macdonald. Perhaps she would tell other people and they would believe it too. His mind sang words as he looked at the shining rails. "I'm *quite* pleased with life. I'm *quite* pleased with life."

Jessie came bothering. "John, come away from that edge!"

He was dragged by an unwilling hand. "Don't call me John," he exclaimed, before he remembered that it was a secret.

"Not call you John! Then what am I to call you, please will you tell me that?"

They went down the stairs, Jessie talking all the way.

He remembered Noel Macdonald that evening and was able to build brick houses with Ilay. They built

a church for the soldiers to go to church in, and Ilay took all the best bricks. John was glad when it came down. He put his hand in with a soldier who was going to church, and when he pulled it out the church tumbled down. He was glad, because he was angry with Jessie asking him questions. "I *won't* answer Jessay." And she said, "Oh, you are difficult to do with, John. I wish I hadn't got to do with you. It is a life." She took the tray and went out of the room saying these things.

He told Mummy a story the next day. He told her that he had seen Mrs Peile, and Mrs Peile had said Peter fought with the Irish terrier at the library. Mummy said, "Oh, naughty Peter! She'll have to keep him on the chain," and John almost screamed with joy because she really did think he had met Mrs Peile. He told Jessie at tea that he had met the Gillam children in Edgecumbe road. . . .

After these things Ilay went to school. It was called Larn and there was a fuss. Granny gave Ilay five shillings. She said, "John will miss you. He *will* be lonely." John said, "No," and Mummy said, "John darling," in the voice that went down. But one evening he and Ilay stood in the window and Ilay put his arm round John's neck and said over and over again, "I do *adore* you. I do *adore* you." Then they built a house with the bricks, and he threw a large brick at Ilay. It hit his mouth and made him bite his tongue, and it bled. So John was not allowed to go into the drawing-room that evening. Mummy came up and sat on his bed and asked him why he had thrown the brick at Ilay. But he did not know.

You cannot explain. You just do things. One day he upset his cocoa and Jessie said it was an accident.

But it was not an accident because he planned to do it.

He thought of a new thing to tell Mummy. He told her he had read it in *Little Folks*. It was about a boy who said "Our Father" wrong. He said, "Lead us into temptation." Mummy thought it came out of *Little Folks*, but really he had made it up.

This is fun.

But he did not like lessons. It was dull, sitting there with Mummy alone. He had to read out of a reading book, or out of a silly book called *Stumps*. Just fancy! John can read so well! And he was made to ready to Granny, and she gave him a shilling. He got another shilling because his tooth came out. It did not bleed anything to speak of. He dropped it in the ink-pot.

There was a story in the reading book about a man who made lions out of butter. Mummy did not know what he made them with. Butter is a buttery word. Then he wrote a copy with a scratchy pen at the dining-room table. Mummy put newspapers over the table-cloth.

It was a foolish copy. You had to write six lines twice three times before it was finished. It rhymed.

Go onward, 'tis better than sitting aside
Idling, sighing and waiting the tide.

It made him think of the shingle. They used to go down with Jessie before Ilay went to school, and in the holidays. Sometimes they paddled and sometimes Jessie would not let them. Shingle is hot and nobbly. There was a baby with his drawers tucked up. He used to fill his bucket with water and pour it out on the bit of sand, and it always dried up.

Mummy and Granny used to come down to the beach

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in a pony carriage with a driver called Corns. His real name was Shanks, only Ilay and John called him that. Sometimes they would take John home in the pony carriage. He sat on the little seat, and Mummy said, "Oh, John, a *great treat*. John loves it, mother."

He did not love it really. His knees used to get in the way of Granny's feet.

There was a family on the beach called Thomason. John knew it was that, and he quarrelled with Jessie because she said it was Thompson; but he knew it was Thomason because Ilay said so and a little girl called Enid with a dinted pail. They were nice. They screamed at each other all the way down the cliff and in the bathing tent and in the water. One was called Richard. Richard Thomason. John would have liked to know them but Jessie said not. She said, "They aren't up to much." So in his mind he knew the Thomasons. He invented another family of Thomasons, a larger one and a noisier one; they were up to much. And whenever he went down to the beach the noble party came too—they shouted to each other on the cliff and John shouted to them from below. "Come on, Thomason! Hurry up, Thomason!" and the real Thomasons heard and jumped and looked round and listened and stared.

John would stroll by the water talking to his friends, Jim and Noel and Christopher. They would throw stones in the sea, ducks and drakes, and the real Thomasons would watch.

Once they tried to make John walk out to sea as far as the bathing machine. Two girls took him, one each hand, but he ran away back to Jessie. Jessie said, "Oh, you silly. Look at Dorcas and Helena. Right out. *They* don't mind the sea." But John did

not say anything. He did not tell her that he made up his mind never to go in the sea. Bathing. He would not bathe. Mummy told him a story about a boy called Bob who had been made strong through bathing every day. It was not a true story, but Mummy and Jessie thought he thought it was. They sat one each side of him and told it all. Dorcas bathes. Enid can swim. Northcott bathes.

John wondered if he would tell Mummy something he knew about Northcott. Something Northcott had done. Jessie would have smacked him if he had done it. He opened his mouth to say about it, and suddenly decided not.

"Oh, John'll go in to-morrow, won't you, John? Walk right out with Dorcas ever so far. *He* isn't afraid."

He hated the beach. Northcott had made him hate it before. But the next day they went to Virieux Castle, and he had milk at the toll-gate. And the next day it rained, and Simpson could not stop the bathroom tap.

He did dictation with Mummy that day. The word "earthworks" came in. He knew what earthworks were, but he wrote the word down as earthworms on purpose. It made nonsense of the sentence. Mummy was stupid. She thought he must have done it by accident because he did not know the difference between the words.

She said, "Why, John, dearest, that's not a very clever thing to do. Didn't you *hear* what I said?"

He did say "Yes," but she did not see what he saw.

It was not that day that Mummy said, "Put the ink away, darling, and listen." The ink went on the davenport. He did not like the feeling of not knowing what was coming.

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"We're going to Scotland," she said. "Soon, soon, soon. Won't it be *fun*? As soon as Ilay goes back."

John asked, "Is Ilay and Granny coming too?"

He did not want Granny, but it seemed as if they ought not to leave her behind. But Ilay was to stay at Larn—Laugharne, he knew how to spell it only he forgot—and perhaps go to Granny for the holidays. So Granny had to stay at Crowthorne. John was not sure about this. There weren't enough of Ilay and Granny to be safe. It would be much safer if they all went to Scotland.

He had forgotten Scotland rather. He remembered sheep and a girl with a red pigtail.

He said, "I want to go to school," which was not true.

"And you shall soon," Mummy said, "as soon as the summer comes."

Granny came in with biscuits and said, "There's a nice busy boy."

He said, "I'm going to Scotland, Granny." But she knew it before, though she pretended to be surprised.

He went and told Jessie. But she knew it too. They all knew it. Ilay said, "What a fuss."

Ilay was detestable. He knew how to annoy Ilay. "You go to a *pig* school. It's not a big school, a pig school."

III

MORDENSTAIR was when you got out and heard porters talking funnily. You wanted to talk too, and in a little while you could. They drove in the car and it changed gear in the drive. He knew all about changing gear because Ilay had told him. He told Mummy.

He knew the garden in little bits. He remembered it. There was a stone wall half-way up the back drive, and once somebody had called the ground ivy fairies' potatoes. And he knew the hall and the fishing-rods, and the pinky stuff that went straight along the flower-beds. He had pulled the pink flowers off and squashed them in his fingers and the gardener came along. They were not pink yet but he knew they would be.

And he remembered falling down the steps.

He did not quite enjoy himself at first. The stairs were wrong and there were different servants, not Ella and Simmy, and Jessie was cross. The towels were all clean and starchy. Also he did not remember where all the paths led to, and you have to find out these things before you can like a place. They might lead somewhere you do not like and then the house is wrong.

But Mordenstair was not wrong. It was strange.

It was not an ordinary house with a fruit garden and two lawns and stables, like Crowthorne. It was funny to start with, because when the garden ended the moor began. Jessie told him not to go, but he

went. There was only a wall between. Part of the garden was a garden, the part with the edging and the rose-trees sticking up and Hamilton turning over the earth. And the rest of it was half wood with bracken and trees, and then just the wall and the moor. The moor stretched away as far as you could see, and there were big hills in the distance. It was the Forest of Atholl, stags and bells and sounds in the evening a very long way off. There was a moor road. It was rutty, but you could walk along it, and you did, and by and by you came to lakes; three lakes all alone on the moor. John did not like the lakes; he liked the wood better with the bracken and the bathing pools where, years ago, the great-aunts used to bathe. They used to come softly out of the house, very early, and run down the passage that led to the wood. Mummy said it was called a ride. It was all grown over with grass now, but it used to be kept cut because they ran down it. And they used to open the wood gate and bathe in the green pool with the bracken growing all round, and then run home again softly down the grassy ride, all in white. He liked to pretend he was the aunts bathing in the great-aunts' pool. And "grassy ride" was nice too. He would run down the grassy ride and open the thin iron gate. Nobody bathed there now. But Daddy saw him and shouted, and he never did it again.

He did not see much of Daddy, only in the evenings when he had his dress tartan on and went down to the dining-room to hear Maclean play. Maclean played on the strip of gravel outside, and sometimes in the hall; when it was over he would come in and stand behind Daddy's chair and drink a glass of wine. And Daddy always said the same thing "Slainge," and Maclean always answered the same thing too, "Slainge"

gael." John did not know how to spell it, only it sounded like that. Then Maclean would stand gravely with his feet together and drink off the wine all at once; and then he and Daddy would talk about game and sheep for a minute or two. John never talked, but he sat and looked at Maclean—Maclane, it sounded, but he knew how to spell that—standing in the shadow behind Daddy's chair with the pipes slung over his arm, and he would think of *Slainge—slainge gael* in the flickering candlelight. It was all candlelight and dark oak and whistling wind. The oak cracked sometimes. There were rose shades over the candles. And apricots with sugar in little dishes. Mummy said not to eat many of them.

Once he went to the front door at night. It was in March and he saw a great red moon rising over the hills like a lamp. Behind him was the dining-room with the silver and the candles shining and the oak all dark, and Maclean talking softly in his up-and-down voice like Hamilton and the porters at the station; and in front of him were the woods all black and the moon all red. The moon made the dining-room feel right, and the silver and the candles made the moon right. One would not have been quite right without the other. . . . If he walked to the iron gate and looked down the ride, there would be somebody waiting—somebody he wanted to see. He hesitated, and nearly went. But he did not go, though he was hardly afraid—somebody waiting on the other side of the gate, and the lakes waiting on the moor. And then Daddy came out to see where the draught was coming from, and he could not go at all. Daddy laughed very loud and sang the song John liked in the daytime:

"He shall have a fishie, in a little dishie,
And a pery Tappie, and a souple Tam."

And John had to go back to the drawing-room. He tried to think of something to say.

He said, "I saw the mountains on the moon."

Daddy pushed him in with his hands on his shoulders and cried to Mummy, "Behold the astronomer." John felt very silly, and angry somehow. He wished there were more people in the drawing-room.

They talked about craters and telescopes, and then it was time to go to bed. He looked at the moon out of the staircase window. There were dark marks on it like trying to rub out with india-rubber. It was just a moon.

§

One day they told him some horrible news. The person who was coming to coach him in readiness for school was a girl.

You would call her a governess. Her name was Emmeline Slingsby. He was sent for into the drawing-room.

Mummy talked. She said, "This is John. Shake hands with Miss Slingsby, darling"—which was humiliating, for he always shook hands. "Would you like to have tea now, or would you rather see your room first?"

"I think I would like to go to my room, if I may."

"Miss Slingsby has two dogs, John. You must get her to tell you all about them."

"Oh yea. John must hear of my pets."

John followed this conversation with much interest. He might not remember just what Mummy said, but

he remembered Miss Slingsby. And he knew what she had said in her letter—"I am 22 years of age." He had seen that bit of it, and he had tried making 2's like that.

She kept on wetting her mouth with her tongue like when you lick stamps. He did it too, when she had gone upstairs. She had a red face—she was fat, rather.

She told him about hockey and how you bullied, with umbrellas. This was the only time when she was interesting.

Lessons were potty. He had settled that he was not going to bother about working, and there might have been a fuss. But there was no fuss, because when he did his work badly she said it was good. . . . Once she gave him an essay to write on "An Ideal Birthday." It was a potty subject. She gave it for prep. and he wrote it in seven minutes. He was not thinking about it at all, or bothering what he wrote. He just jabbed things down. And she was so pleased that she nearly showed it to Mummy. He only just stopped her. It was the same with Scripture; he would say his verses so that they sounded like rubbish, and then she would stop him and say, "John, I don't think you quite understand that word." And she would give him full marks.

He did not mind all this so much, but the long afternoon walks were horrible. Sometimes Mrs MacGillivray would come too, with Miles in the cart; but that could not be often, and then only along the Morden road, because John and Miss Slingsby could walk so much faster and get over gates. He always asked if they could go along the road and call at the Manse. But she liked the Moor road best, along to the first loch and back again. "Come on, John, let's walk to Loch

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Ellen." He could never tell her how he hated the lakes, and how it was almost too much to bear, waiting for the moment when you saw them glittering on the moor. He was never quite sure which corner you had to turn to see them; the corners were all alike. He would shut his eyes at each turn of the road and open them slowly, in case he had to see the distant gleam. But even the dread was better than the nothingness of the dullness.

She bored him so much that one day he left her. The moor road became all at once too wearisome to be borne any longer, and he simply climbed over the wall and ran away. He knew she would not try to overtake him, for the moor was rocky with great tough clumps of heather, which he could leap over and she could not. It was very easy.

He ran for some time, till he felt far enough away from the road; then he lay down in the heather, which he always wanted to do but people never would allow. You had to think of your beastly kilt or trews or whatever you happened to be wearing. Heather marks things with little lines like a pencil. But to-day he did not care. It tickled and prickled and was as springy as a very thick carpet. He knew that everything was all over and that he could never see Miss Slingsby again; Miss Slingsby from Yorkshire. Skipton, it was Skipton; it sounded a nice place. He could hear her voice saying exactly what she would say, "It's a pity you spoilt our walk." That made him angry, so that he stamped on the heather with his heels. Our walk. If he did not take great care she would make the moor a wrong place, as wrong as Crowthorne. She would not have mattered at Crowthorne.

And Mummy would say things too. Mummy would

pretend to be shocked and say, "Oh, John, where were your manners? How *rude*." And Daddy would laugh and call him Jorrocks, or Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour. But he was alone for a little while before all the talking began, and he could lie and look at the big forest of Atholl in the east. He knew it was the east, because he had asked; but he had known before he asked, because it is always the east. The west is wrong. You always go east. If he went east he would find somebody.

He shut his eyes, and the queer feeling began which comes sometimes when you are in bed; the slowing down of everything as if all the world were just going to stop. Very soon came the sound of a voice which talked more slowly than could be believed. It went talking on and on; until John sat up and looked at the hills and said "Eila, Eila," to himself. He did not want Ilay; but when you say it softly it sounds so sad.

§

Ilay came home for the holidays just after Miss Slingsby left. At the very last John was sorry and wanted her to stay; but afterwards he was glad, for he had not gone on wanting it. When she had gone he suddenly remembered that he had never asked about the dogs, after all. It came upon him in the night and made him so miserable that he felt he could not bear it any longer, and decided to write to her the next day and ask all about them. But the next day Ilay came home.

Ilay was like Daddy. He had the same face exactly, with the nose and chin that always amused John rather. They seemed funny and nice somehow, like Mr Punch'a. When Daddy was eating toast at breakfast his chin

curled up and his nose curled down. Ilay's would look the same. He kept his chin in the air because he was quite sure of what he was going to say next. Little Ilay Head-in-air. John liked Ilay now because he made him laugh.

The weather was warm and fine, and they used to take their lunch out into the woods. Once or twice Mummy came too, and sometimes Jessie and Miles MacGillivray. When John looked at the bracken he always thought of a smell—the smell of lemon-scented verbena which you put on your hands and your neck to keep the horse-flies off. Jessie wore a veil, for if the clegs bit you, you might possibly die. So she said; but John knew it was only a saying, for one day he watched a cleg biting the back of his hand hard, and he did not die at all. Lunch in the woods made you think of baskets and a buzz and the smell of verbena. He liked it.

The nicest times were when he and Ilay went out alone. They would do all sorts of things. They would follow the stream all the way up the wood, and climb over the rocks; they often did this, and they always got wet. Ilay was spoiling his knickers, Jessie said. The stream in one place was just a little trickle of water running along and singing in the bracken, but it really was the moor stream going down to the bathing pool. There was one place where a little waterfall fell over the stones. He and Ilay sometimes dammed it, and the water used to spout out over them suddenly. It was nice on hot days by the stream—cool and wet and green and quiet. They used to lie there and suck acid drops.

Ilay always talked. He told John a lot about the boys and the masters. John knew all about the boys, Slade-

Smith, Parratt, Franks, Lutyens one and Lutyens two. And David Garnett. He liked the sound of David Garnett. If you were a certain sort of chap, people called you by your Christian name. He wondered if they called Ilay Ilay Menzies. It was quite decent to say Ilay Menzies.

He made a David Garnett himself, and talked to him, to astonish Ilay. Ilay needed astonishing. Sometimes he would not talk for a long time because he was talking to David Garnett.

But very often he listened to Ilay. Ilay knew all about shooting and fives and rugger. And he knew lots of other things as well—things chaps told other chaps at school, stories and rhymes and limericks. Franks had had all his privs taken away for a fortnight and had to weed the Head's garden for hours, because he had written a limerick in his "Fabuly Fassily" and been found out, silly cow. Ilay told John the limerick, and John saw the point, though he did not see the points of some of the stories. He would have died rather than acknowledge this. Once he nearly asked something, only he remembered in time not to.

He did not tell Ilay much more interesting things than those. He did not tell him about Heaven. This always came when you shut your eyes tight and thought hard. One voice in his head said, "Heaven will go on for ever," and another voice said, "It must stop some day," and the first said, "Not sometimes, but always," and the second said again, "But it *must* stop some day," and the two sides rose up and fought till they ended in a deadlock. He could feel them fighting in his head. And neither side could win, because Heaven must go on for ever, and all the time it was awful to think of

things never stopping. Like a road going on and on; only all roads stop.

Ilay never knew about this, nor about many other curious and interesting things.

§

Visitors were a curse. Mummy said he was not to say that. She often talked to them in the hall, and John would hurl himself downstairs and be suddenly among them.

This was perfectly appalling.

Some said, "Oh, is this John? Come and talk to me, John." They must have known he had nothing to say. Then they would take his hand, and hold it until he wriggled it away.

Some said, "What a big boy! We must put a weight on your head." This was the kind that Ilay would call silly cows. And one lady actually said, "Oh, what a dear curlyhead!" This made John so hot with shame that he could not think of it even in bed—it made him feel hot in his stomach and all over prickles like a porcupine. Your stomach always gets hot when people say things like that. Jessie was annoyed when they talked about stomachs; it is an ugly word, anyway. Ilay knew some other words, but Jessie was crosser still.

One day he was sent for, and shook hands with several ladies. It was the last one who spoke to him. She said:

"I hear Loch Ellen ramped down the hill in the Christmas holidays."

John found this interesting. He had not seen Loch Ellen ramping, but he knew quite well the story of how it had flooded and burst its bounds and nearly drowned

a hundred sheep. Maclean had gone out, and Hamilton and Seton and Mr MacGillivray. He liked the word "ramping" too. They talked about Loch Ellen and the sheep very happily for some time, and John was able to talk, because she was not trying to make a fool of him for all the room to hear. After Loch Ellen, they talked about all kinds of things, and John told her about his tooth-brush with the yellow handle like a jujube.

She said, "If I had one I should suck it all day."

"They cost ninepence," John said, and felt shy suddenly.

The lady did not feel shy. She said, "I wish you'd come over and see me one afternoon. I've got some photos you'd like to see—of all round here and the lochs being made. Will you?"

"I should like to come," John said. He added, "Thank you," remembering his manners. The lady was going to say something else, but Mummy called out, "John, bring Mrs Taggart's cup with you," so he had to go away. Before he went the lady who was Mrs Taggart said, "Now don't forget."

He did not forget. He liked Mrs Taggart. She was the sort of person who would not call you a well-grown boy, and talk to you to make other people listen and laugh at you. He remembered the invitation all the holidays, particularly when he brushed his teeth; but he never asked Mummy about it. One often does this about the things one wants most.

The last week of the holidays was wet. The rain slanted down from the mountains and cut one's knees; and after a while the Morden road was under water, and then they had to stay in. It was dull in the schoolroom with Jessie darning things (Illy used to

go out and clean bicycles and talk to Hamilton and Hay and Seton), and one day John had an idea. He went into the library and read books.

It was a good idea. The library was interesting. It had large leathery chairs and things to strike matches on, and photographs of Daddy and the uncles when they were at Rugby and Dunrobin and Oxford. John remembered years ago being held up in somebody's arms to find Uncle—he could not remember which. And there was a tune, *Because he was a Bonnie Lad*. He knew the tune. Somebody had sung it to him then. The shelves were full of books. Scott in lots of volumes, *Blackwood's Magazine* and Dickens. There were hundreds more, but he liked the *Treasury of Poets* best in ten volumes. He decided to read straight through, every single poem. It was difficult to make up your mind, for they all looked exciting with "s's" like "f's"; he only fixed on Ben Jonson and Herrick because the poetry was so short. He put the Swift volume back.

Daddy came in then.

It was not Daddy's business. He generally burst out laughing, pulled John's forelock and said something about Jorrocks. This is what fathers do. But he was stupid; he looked at the book with his eyes screwed up, like Ilay looked. He said, "Good heavens, what has the hope of the house got hold of?"

John said, "Only a book." He said it rather shortly. It was a silly answer, only he wanted Daddy to go.

But Daddy did not go. He said "Dullish work." And then he whistled for Mummy, two notes up and one down. It was the call.

Mummy came in. They did not say anything for

a minute. Then she said, "Don't you want to go and see what Ilay's doing?"

John said, "No."

"I think Jessie wants you, as a matter of fact."

"Jessie doesn't want me," John said.

"Run along, John darling." Then, as he did not run, she said, "Run along and get ready for tea."

John was very angry. He put down the book and walked out. There is something about run along! which makes you angrier. He knew they didn't want him in the library, only they would not tell him so. They would never tell him.

When he went in again, they had locked the book-case. The key was gone.

It was strange.

He turned away, hearing Daddy's voice say "kairious." Daddy said it just like that. "That's very kairious." It was curious. They did not want him to see the book. There was a secret; like in Ilay's stories. They knew the secret. He tried to find if the books in the nursery bookshelf knew it, but they were not very interesting. The *Golden Treasury* and *Marmion*. Ilay was learning *To Daffodils* for a holiday task. He said it was bilge. Bilge is a good word. There were things by Herrick in the *Golden Treasury*, but they were not as interesting as the old Herrick with long "s's." Nothing was interesting in the nursery bookshelf. He could have read *Marmion* downstairs. It was Daddy's fault.

The weather cleared up after that, and he went out to hear Maclean play *The Marquess of Huntly's Highland Fling* or *Monymusk* or *Gillie Callum*. And there was the one Daddy asked for once, and John had liked to hear him say it, and had always hoped he would say

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it again. *Atholl and Breadalbane*. It was right somehow. There might be people who said it wrong, but Daddy would always say it right. *Atholl and Breadalbane*. How kairious. And when he thought of that, he thought of Daddy and Mummy locking the book-case, and he would stop and wonder about the secret. Perhaps it was like the Glamis secret; a secret in the family. He could never think of anything secret enough to make a secret of. Of course there were things you mustn't say in front of people; but it wasn't those. Nobody minded about those, really. It was like Glamis.

They teased him in the evening about going to school, and Latin. John knew about Latin. He had opened a book of Ilay's once and seen "*Triste bellum*—gloomy war." Those two words were Latin. He did not want to learn any more. A cold grey sky and men with desperate faces hacking with swords and axes . . .

IV

HE was to go to school, but not to Ilay's school. It rhymed with Ilay's when you said it—
Laugharne, Acharn. Acharn was not a pleasant name. It sounded as if it must be miles from everywhere on a moor with lakes. He would have liked Acharn if it had not sounded like lakes. But he saw it in his mind. The sun was setting and the windows were black, but the lakes were red. The moor was full of stones. It was near Inverdocherty really, and there was no moor at all. He had a new suit, a grey jacket and trews, to wear every day. On Sundays you wore a kilt if you had one: at Ilay's school they wore Etons, but then Ilay had smooth hair.

Jessie used to brush John's hair till his neck ached and he wanted to sneeze, but it did not make any difference, even if you damped the brush. They cut it before he went to Acharn, but it grew again at once. People asked him if he wanted to go to school. "Shall you like it?" He did not know. He always said "Yes." But going to school does not mean much till the day. Lying in bed and thinking about it does not make it real when it is ten days off. He always saw Acharn on the moor with the lakes, but it did not make him unhappy. He liked his new suit. Daddy gave him five shillings.

It was a good thing to go away from Jessie too. He was tired of Jessie. He did not have much to do with

her now, but she reminded him of nursery dinner, whiting and prunes and other things that are beastly, and which you are told are good for you. Whiting is good for the brain. So Jessie said. He loathed whiting.

He hoped it would not be whiting and prunes at Acharn.

The bad time did not begin till the car came round for the station. Then he knew suddenly that he was going away and perhaps he would never come back. And he did not know what he was going to. That was worst of all. It was not like shopping at Perth and coming back at night. Mummy would come back.

It was dreadful in the car. He felt ill suddenly, horribly, degradingly ill. He nearly screamed out to Mummy that he wanted to go home, but somehow he did not dare. Supposing he *had* done it, and the car had turned, and they were going back to Mordenstair, he knew he would stop feeling ill. He tried to pretend it had happened, and they were going home. Then he felt better, but soon it came back again, Acharn and boys and a new place, and he felt so sick that he could hardly swallow. But he never was sick. It could not happen. Some people were sick in the train, but they were silly cows, and he and Ilay despised them. He wondered suddenly what Ilay had felt like when he went to Laugharne. It had never occurred to him to think about it before. Most likely Ilay didn't mind. You couldn't imagine him minding anything. Mummy said, "John, don't scowl so awfully, darling."

§

Acharn was ordinary; not Acharn at all. It was just a house with a drive and playing fields and a wood.

There was no bracken in the wood, and no moor, and no hills, only a golf links.

Mr Brent was the headmaster. He had deep creases down his face when he smiled; and Mrs Brent had grey hair and seemed older still, which was queer. There were other masters. One was called Mr Paget, and he came running in to tea from the playing fields with a white collar and a red face. John had tea with Mummy in the drawing-room; only a little bread and butter and a bun, because the school tea was at six. He forgot what happened exactly after that. They went upstairs and there were little bedrooms and Mrs Squire and boxes corded up in the passages. One had G. H. O. on it. After that Mummy was gone.

Somebody came up to him and said, "Here's another. Husap, take him down. What's your name? How old are you?" On being told he did not sneer and walk off as boys do in books, but wrote things down on a sheet of paper. Then he said to another boy with long grey trousers, "The Mariners are one short. I put Todd Two down in the Mariners, but I don't know if this isn't a heftier one. He isn't Todd One's little frair so it doesn't matter," which was mostly Greek to John; but it seemed to be quite satisfactory, for they wrote more things down on the sheet of paper and went away. Then a lady came up to him—he was standing with two other new boys—and said, wreathed in smiles (this comes in a book), "Oh, here are some more little news. You aren't guardin' three are you?" John was going to tell her that no one had told him to guard anybody, only he could not think how to say it quick enough, and she went on saying, "Well, don't look so stony," and then John could not say anything at all, because he knew if

he spoke something awful would happen. He would cry.

She did not talk to him any more. But he found that Garden Three was a chap, and that there was a Garden One and a Garden Two. It was not guarding at all. He found this out at tea because all the names were read out and all the chaps said, "Yes, sir," in turn. Presently there was a pause, and somebody said, "There he is, next Garden," and somebody else, opposite to him, said, "Speak, you fool."

Mr Brent called down the table, "Isn't Menzies there?"

John called back "Yes" much louder than he had meant to.

"Then you should answer to your name, my boy."

John could not finish his bread and butter after that, although he had to. Nobody else seemed to mind. They passed golden syrup about, even to him. After tea he went into the big hall again and stood with the other new boys till the big boy who had written things down came up to him and said, "You're my set. You're a Mariner. Menzies." Then he showed John where to put his boots and other things.

He was not unkind. Nobody was unkind.

§

By the end of a week he had learnt a great many things. He learnt that you must not ask questions without putting your hand up, nor open your desk without leave, though it is sometimes possible to smuggle inside small objects such as magnets without attracting the master's notice. Masters sometimes see things less than at other time. He learnt that if some chap shows

ignorance of a thing which you yourself know, it is the correct thing to remark under your breath, "Poor fool!" "Oh, really!" "Oh, *easy!*" till the master tells you to stop. He learnt that the accusative singular is AM and the plural AS and that you ought to put the verb at the end. And he learnt that people will believe anything if you tell it to them in the proper way—not only Mummy, but chaps.

He found this out one evening before tea, when his class was collecting prep., tidying desks and swopping pencils. John's desk was not so untidy as some of the others—he had straightened it up in Scripture—and as he waited for Garden Three and Mackenzie Two he read the names of the books on the Lower School shelf. There were *Tanglewood Tales*, *The Talisman* and other perfectly nice books. There was the *Golden Treasury* too, and it reminded him of lots of things he had read at home; but it was not so decent as the book Ilay had, he forgot its name, with "O Captain! my Captain!" in it. Mr Paget had asked them if there was any special poetry they would like to learn, and John knew that by heart already. "O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done!" It would be difficult to say it decently to Mr Paget. He turned to Mackenzie Two, who had stopped cleaning his desk to look at *The Boy's Own Book of Butterflies*, and asked, "Do you know 'O Captain! my Captain!'?"

"What sort's that?" said Mackenzie Two, and John saw he mustn't do this again. You talked about poetry when you had to learn it, and said that *Sussex* was decent, or *To Daffodils* fearful muck; but you didn't ask people bung out like that. He tried to cover his blunder, and he did, and it became known in the Lower School that Menzies had a butterfly called the Captain

of Captains, which was such an attractive name that the Middle School took it up, and biggish boys would come to John to inquire, "I say, what's all this about a butterfly?" John, driven into a corner, was forced to invent or look a fool: it was deep orange with violet markings in the form of a figure 8. He liked thinking about his butterfly as he lay in bed before getting-up bell. There were awkward moments when chaps, considering him an authority, asked questions about butterflies in general; but he found out pretty soon that if you say things in a decided enough voice people will believe you, and go round telling other people all about it. Once or twice John was in conversation with the First Class about this matter: though not with O'Farrell.

§

O'Farrell was in the school choir. John noticed him in chapel after about a week; till then he had only realised the top chaps as a tall chap in grey who had kicked him once when he did not go into chapel fast enough, and Husack. Husack was the head of the Mariners, so John had to know him. And now there was O'Farrell.

The funny thing was that O'Farrell had been there all the time, only John hadn't seen him. He tried to remember if he had noticed him before, and almost persuaded himself that he had, only it was all a blur—playing cricket, or drinking lemonade, or chasing somebody else round the asphalt, or singing "Ye holy angels bright" in chapel. The first week was difficult to remember straight, anyhow.

He found out O'Farrell's name by accident. He said to Mackenzie Two, "Who's the chap third down

in the choir, organ side?" Mackenzie Two was in a bad temper and said, "Some heady swab." So John had to find out for himself, and he was almost glad, for he was not absolutely sure that he wanted to know the name at all. You don't, always. You ask people, and then wait, hoping that they will not answer.

He saw it on the green baize board and knew it at once. It said, "The following may have their colours—Clayton, Sword One, O'Farrell."

The green baize board was very decent, and John liked it. And O'Farrell was O'Farrell. He had to be. Part of John's mind was surprised when he knew it for certain, and part was not surprised at all. O'Farrell, Patrick M. But the masters called him Paddy.

§

That was the cricket term.

Afternoon work lasted till four, and then you changed and went out and played in the Lower School game for two hours, unless you were chosen for hay-making or field fag. Field fag means weeding, and prodding up daisies with a fork. It bored John, but not so much as cricket did.

Mr Paget took the Lower School game. He stood by the wickets with the score-book and smoked a pipe. Other people bowled and went in to bat, and John fielded. He always fielded. There were two places to stand in, both hot, and when Mr Paget called "Over," he walked from one to the other. You do. Everybody was supposed to bat in turn, but it was generally "All in" before they got to John. He did bat sometimes, of course. He batted rather hard, and sent the ball into the second game. It hit somebody. Mr Paget

said his tactics were wrong. He did not know why.

Fielding was not much fun. Sometimes a chap would turn a somersault when Mr Paget was not looking; Garden Three used to try to walk on his hands. Pullan and Sword One could do this. Then Mr Paget would shout, and nobody would do anything for five minutes.

One day there were the set matches. The Mariners played the Vikings and the Norsemen and all the other sets, and John had to play too. There were twelve Mariners, and one of them had to be left out of the eleven, but it was not John. He was pleased at this. He wrote and told Mummy, "I played for my set. It was in the Norsemen match."

This sounded more exciting than it was.

But it was not a bad match. Husack told Clayton this. He said, "Pretty sweaty effort." So John said "Pretty sweaty effort" to Mackenzie Two as they were walking in together. Mackenzie Two said, "Bags I the effort," which was silly. He and John played a game of bagging things when they went for walks: John had bagged all the dogs in the world. He was glad he had thought of this before Mackenzie Two.

The Mariners played the Vikings next day. O'Farrell was a Viking. He bowled John out, but not first ball. John did not enjoy the few minutes he was at the wicket being bowled by O'Farrell. There is always the fear that you may make a cow of yourself. Husack was at the other end, neatly chipping and stopping. John could not do it like that. He came out too far, and was bowled.

Husack told him about it. He walked down the field with him, explaining what he ought to have done, and John felt hot and stupid. Then a whole crowd of

chaps came up, and everyone stopped and stood in a ring—talking about nothing—and then O'Farrell in his wonderful white flannels, with his sleeves rolled up, poked his head in and asked, “Anything happening?” For a minute John gazed at him dumb. He knew he could tell O'Farrell things. But O'Farrell did not understand, only smiled and went away. As he went, he hallooed to Sword Two, who was coming down from the Pavilion practising overarm bowling.

John heard him. He said, “Fetch the biscuit tin from the Pav., my burly fellow. The one my snake's in.”

Sword Two went, but John would have run faster. He knew the tin; it had holes and the grass snake put his green head out. He hated it exceedingly. All the same, he would have liked to fetch it for O'Farrell.

He met Mannering on the asphalt, and stopped to speak. Mannering had played for the Aztecs, and made eighteen runs.

John said, “Eighteen runs. Burly fellow.” He wanted to say it, because O'Farrell had said it.

Mannering said, “Swine, you got that off Husack. Class Six shall sit on your corpse.”

John said, “Swine yourself, my burly fellow.”

Mannering went off, after the usual shin-kicking, and John was glad he had not said, “You got that off O'Farrell.” He said it over to himself as he washed his hands in the changing room. “Burly fellow; burly fellow.” But Sword Two was the burly fellow.

§

In the summer holidays John met a girl.
Her name was Varna—a stupid sort of name—and

she arrived one day in a motor with a mother in white furs. The mother disappeared, but Varna came upstairs, "to play," Mummy said. John did not want her, and had nothing to say to her, but this did not matter, because Varna did all the talking. She began to talk very loud as soon as she had finished shaking hands.

"Do you know, we've got a dog too—he isn't an Aberdeen terrier, though, he's a wire-haired, and if you throw a ball he'll go and fetch it at once, *but* instead of bringing it back to you he'll run round and round and round and round and round and round and round."

John was looking at her hard. Evidently she thought it was because of his interest in the story, and immediately began to tell another; but it was only because he had never seen anybody quite so odd. She was dark and thin, with arms like sticks, and the very shortest skirts John had ever seen. And when she got to the middle of the story her voice was like a cock crowing.

In an hour she had given them the history of several dogs, cats and canaries, recited two poems, and played two pieces on the schoolroom piano. Ilay had his tea and went out; he flatly refused to stay, so John had to bear the burden of her, supported by Jessie mending a sheet. There was no need for him to talk. Jessie was a sport and asked questions; and then she was off, like wood being set fire to by a match.

"Is your governess nice?"

"Well, she's like—— Have you ever seen a stick on fire at one end? I'll tell you what I call her." Then she went on, while Dusty the Aberdeen went to sleep and woke up.

John had never had such a tiring afternoon. But

he had gained experience, for he knew now what girls were like.

Girls were bores. Illy said "Oh, my Lord!" under his breath. No boy could ever be a bore like a girl. They were useless too.

John said, "I don't see any point in girls."

But Palmer the English housemaid heard him, and she said, "Oh, but you will some day. You wait," and John was angry, because if he did not see any point in Varna now, why should he ever see it?

He said, "I shan't get foolisher as I get older. *You may.*"

And Palmer said, "Well, you take the cake." And Jessie said, "John—mind."

He went to bed in a bad temper.

§

The autumn term was a very important one. John was put into the Middle School and learnt all about the Ablative Absolute. Also his class worked often in the same room as O'Farrell's. One day O'Farrell admired a clear amber pen-holder on John's desk, and John heroically offered it as a most unworthy swop for a pencil in a sham brass case with an amethyst which got in the way when you bit. He had loved sucking the end of his pen, but he would have done more than that for O'Farrell. He liked to think of him sucking the same place.

There were five new boys that term, and John was lordly to them but quite kind. It seemed queer that they should not know where the library was, or the changing room; one of them actually burst through the big schoolroom in the sacred hour of early prep. You

corrected them kindly and a little contemptuously, poor chaps. One was in John's class, and had learnt Latin with a queer pronunciation that John somehow liked—*gowde-ah-mus*. But he never let anyone know that he liked it, and always exchanged glances with Mannering.

That was the term of catapults made of shiny wood that you polished in class when the master wasn't looking. They catapulted in the field, and John never broke anything worth mentioning. And it was through the catapults that he was able to serve O'Farrell.

It happened one afternoon before footer, when he was coming away from Mr Brent's study after getting his new boxing gloves. The swing doors flashed in the distance, and he knew it was O'Farrell coming by his walk.

O'Farrell was the sort of chap who always beamed and spoke to you when he met you in the corridors. He would speak to the squits in the eighth class when he met them. It was queer but true. He spoke now, but he was not beaming.

"I say, is Bruggins there?"

John said, "He was." The study had two doors, so you sometimes lost Mr Brent.

O'Farrell dropped his voice. "I say, I've done such a fool thing. I've been and bust that swinish frame of Bruggins'—you know, in the garden. It was a pure accident, of course. I catapulted bung into the foul thing, and now I've got to go and tell the old man."

"I think he's in there now," John said. He knew what it was O'Farrell had broken; it was called something like expensive gardening, and it meant growing a lot of things under one bit of glass. There was nothing much under the glass now, but still, glass is glass. They walked up the corridor together. O'Farrell talking and

describing, and John letting him talk, hoping he would go on till they reached the anteroom. He wanted to be there and wait for O'Farrell: pretend that he wanted writing-paper or something.

O'Farrell went in. And John fidgeted about at the stationery cupboard, counting nibs, till he came out again. Then he took a nib and two pieces of writing-paper. He did it very well; O'Farrell never knew that he had meant to wait. They went out together.

"It's all right. He's going to stop my cash in sections. As a matter of fact, I believe I've got enough in the bank. I don't mind telling you that I funked it foully, for I broke a foul window last term. Come out and play fives. We'll scrape up a burly four."

They went out to the fives court talking, on equal terms. And John thanked his stars that he had not done what he had wanted to do more than anything in the world. All the time he was counting the nibs he had been wondering whether he could not rush in and take O'Farrell's caning. "It was me broke the frame." But he saw it would not have done. There had been no caning, and in any case O'Farrell would have been annoyed. "Menzies did a foul thing this afternoon." He had served him in the only possible way.

§

Scripture was a scourge.

It was every Sunday afternoon from three to four—longer, sometimes, when Mr Brent thought so. You sat quite still with your legs out underneath the desk, leaning back in your seat, with your book open in front of you. You shaded your eyes with your hands, so that if you wanted to, you could stare at nothing for long

stretches of time. A master, or one of the two mistresses, patrolled the room, or sat at the big desk. When they looked your way, your lips moved busily, learning verses. There was no necessity to do any work after the first twenty minutes.

Some chaps wrote letters or read *Tanglewood Tales* under the blotting-paper. John didn't. He generally dozed.

There was one game you always played, when it was Miss Cheshire or Miss Sykes—not Mr Paget. You asked questions—held your hand up, of course, and got them rushing about.

It went in classes. Four boys in Class Two would ask what a teraphin was: the first because he really wanted to know, the other three because they wanted to make Miss Cheshire walk. Then three boys out of Class Four would ask what milch kine were. And naturally anyone who could manage it would ask what a concubine was.

John knew the concubine joke. He knew what a concubine was too—an inferior wife. There is something very funny about an inferior wife. But he never knew he was being funny when he asked what Rahab the harlot was.

He wanted to know. They were doing the story about the red cord, and he liked it, only he could not make out why they always called her the harlot. So he asked Miss Sykes.

The queer thing was that she went red and didn't seem to know what to say. And then she said very low and decisively, "A bad woman."

Something in the way she said it gave John a creep down his back. He could see the bad woman: she had a gleam in her eyes and a knife in her hand—she was

seeking for blood. But Rahab didn't seem like that. She was a sport, really. And another queer thing was that the big boys thought it was funny, and it wasn't funny: not like an inferior wife.

§

Towards the end of the term John wrote to Mummy with a very special purpose. It was not a Sunday letter, so it had to be short. He wrote it badly, for Mummy to see that he was in a hurry.

It said:

"DEAR MUMMY. Thank you for the footer stockings. Can I ask a boy for part of the holidays? I hope I can. He lives near Perth. Your loving son,
"JOHN."

The answer was as he had expected. "Darling—certainly ask your friend—which friend is it?"—a question John forgot to answer. He could think of nothing but the impossibility of really asking O'Farrell. It was different from playing fives with him or swopping pens; he would consider John a swabby squit or something else unpleasant beginning with "s." Mummy continued to write and ask questions, and John continued in a state of unhappy indecision. Every time he saw O'Farrell he made up his mind to ask him; and then they would talk of Brownie films or fountain pen squirts, and he couldn't. You can't say suddenly, "Will you come and stay with us these hols.?" after filling a fountain pen and making an inky mess on the desk. He waited till a few days before the end of the term, and then he had to, if he ever meant to at all. It was not

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a success; he stammered and repeated his words and made it sound nervous and idiotic.

"That's jolly decent of you," said O'Farrell when it was all over. "I should simply love to if my people will let me. I bet they will. I can always get round Granny. I'll bring a hockey-stick, shall I?"

He was quite calm and not excited at all. John was not calm. He could not think about the hockey-stick because it was O'Farrell who was coming.

Christmas was coming too. There were surprises, and things that were not surprises, the better kind. *You must tell me what you would like.* He liked books best, but if you asked for "a book" you were likely to get tosh like *Percy the Prefect*. Those books were generally bound in the same way, peacock-blue with gold letters. It was hard and sneering somehow, as if they thought anything would do. And the schools were not at all like Acharn. *Stalky and Co.* wasn't like Acharn either, but that was different. The talking was glorious. "'Tis but a little faded flower." "Where's my Horace?" Very likely big chaps did talk like that. He read the cat chapter over and over again.

V

O'FARRELL came; and it was all different from what John had expected.

Mummy thought he was delightful and that it was so nice for John to have such a friend; and John did earnestly hope she would not say this in public; for of course they weren't really friends at all, only in John's mind. And this cannot be explained. He was afraid all the time that O'Farrell thought the invitation cheek, and was desperately anxious not to know this for certain.

Ilay liked him too, after an evening of guardedness and surface conversation, during which John nearly screamed with anguish. And Ilay had not meant to like him; John knew this for a fact. Ilay was bored with the whole thing, because they weren't in Edinburgh. The house in Edinburgh was let, and Daddy lived at the Club when he went to town, so it was quite reasonable really, only Ilay would not see it. He did not like O'Farrell knowing they were in the country and not in Edinburgh. Some people do mind. John didn't, because he liked Mordenstair.

And O'Farrell didn't mind either. He did not mind anything. He liked Mummy and Ilay and Mordenstair and the dogs and the stupid little red-haired Colquhoun girl at the stupid party they went to at Inverkeillour. Most likely he liked John too, but that did not seem to matter very much.

It was wonderful at first. It was O'Farrell on the green baize board, and yet it was Paddy. O'Farrell on the baize board walking downstairs and slamming doors and buying sweets at Mrs Seton's in the village. You had to tell people that he was a boy (not a chap nor a fellow) from your school. And everybody said, "What a nice boy."

The weather was fine, and they went out a good deal. They went to three parties. And they actually had a party themselves, which all the same children came to who had been at the other parties—the Colquhouna, and the Gregor Stewarts and Eric MacLeod Campbell, who was a loathsome little kid in sailor suits. He tried to kick John, and his sister told Mummy that John was being unkind. Mummy said, "John dear, remember he's a guest."

John did not want him for a guest.

And they went out for long walks, and Ilay always came too.

Of course John had meant Ilay to come too; only he had not meant him to talk to Paddy all the time. But he did. They talked about games and shooting and swimming, and sometimes they said things that John did not hear. They were both quite decent to him, only it wasn't the same as he had thought.

But then Paddy was not the same as he had thought. He had meant to show him the bathing pool, and then they would dam it up without Ilay. He did not do this.

One day they went out and left John behind. It was not their fault, because they were biking, and John hadn't a bike. He did not mind much.

That was the day when he went down to the burn by himself. Mummy sent him with a note for Mrs

MacGillivray. Mummy was sorry he could not go with Ilay and Paddy; he told her he was sorry too.

He went by the short way, down the steep part of the wood and over the bridge. There was a path, but he did not keep to it, and went slipping and sliding among the trees down to the burn.

Before he got there, he had a sudden feeling: the feeling that something nice is going to happen. Everything was leading up to the nicest thing in the world. He slipped and slid down the last few yards and ran to kneel at the edge of the water.

He hated sea, but he liked water running over stones.

The feeling went on. He saw the water running over the stones, and nearly laughed because such decent things were going to happen. It lasted over the bridge, but as he walked through the fields to the village it was all ordinary again.

Nothing particular did happen, of course. But he was glad he had had the nice feeling.

Ilay and Paddy came back at seven. They had been to Glenhowe over the Howe Bridge. They talked about it. Paddy talked about it next day at lunch. He said, "I've motored to Glenhowe. It's not very far from Glenlogie. We weren't far from Glenlogie."

Paddy lived at Glenlogie. John knew all about it. He lived with his grandmother because his people were in India.

Daddy said, "What's far from Glenlogie?" He was eating very ferociously with his chin out like Ilay. John thought Daddy looked ferocious. It is a good word.

Paddy said, "Glenhowe, where we went." He would have gone on, but Daddy went on too.

"Glenlogie. What about it? Glenlogie is Murray's place."

Paddy said, "Mrs Murray. She's my grandmother."

Paddy said, "Murray, Beatrice Murray. What's her name now? She was here. She's your aunt."

Paddy said, "My mother's name is Rosalind." John knew that to. Rosalind Murray is a pretty name.

Daddy was talking quite a lot. He said, "And Robin Murray, Sonia. You know, the one the boy was thick with."

"He's my uncle," Paddy said.

And Daddy said, "At Oxford, Sonia. Sonia!" He did not often call Mummy that, mostly So, or Sophy.

Mummy said, "Yes, I know." She had the headache look. It was interesting knowing Paddy's relations. But afterwards John was angry because Paddy and Ilay had a joke, and they did not tell him. He would not ask, of course.

§

Paddy and John went away the same day. It was exciting. John went to Edinburgh to stay with the Mackenzies. They lived in George Street, and had red hair. John went to the Castle, and to St. Giles, and the eldest Mackenzie of all, who was at Edinburgh Academy, let him ride his bicycle. Edinburgh Academy is not a squat school which you go to with your satchel under your arm. It was very cold and windy and he had chilblains. But Edinburgh was decent. There were trams that went to Joppa and Pilrig and Gorgie and other queer places. And Portobello. Portobello has a pier. Penelope fell in love with a pierrot. . . . They went to Portobello on a tram, but it was wet and there were coal-carts. In Princes Street there is a

shop where you sit on a high stool and eat cress fingers. And there is a very old man in tartans who thinks he is Bonnie Prince Charlie.

John had been asked for a week, but on the sixth day Mrs. Mackenzie said he was to stay on till term began, and go back with Hugh and Alastair. John was glad. They went to the Rink. But two or three days after that he had a post card from Ilay. It was a puppy chewing boots, and Ilay only said, "What cheer?" But the postmark was Arming. John could not make out what Ilay thought he was doing at Crowthorne. He began to suspect that something must be happening at home. What it was he could not even dimly guess, because nothing at all had been happening when he went away except that Mummy had a headache and stayed in bed; and a day or two later a note arrived from Granny which made matters more mysterious still:

"**MY DEAR LITTLE JOHN.** (He raged.)—I know you will be surprised to hear that Ilay is here, having such a good time with the snow. (There was not likely to be a bucketful of snow at Crowthorne, and if there was John knew Ilay would not have a good time with it. Ilay did not play with snow.) He sends his love (John knew Ilay better). I am sure you are having a lovely time in Edinburgh. Have you been to Arthur's Seat? As I expect you know, your Mother has not been well, but we all hope she will soon get better. Ever so much love and kisses."

It was a mystifying letter, and John's only guess was that Mummy had something deadly infectious, like scarlet fever. In books, scarlet fever begins with

a headache. The thought was worrying, because nobody had ever been ill as long as he remembered. For a minute he wanted to ask Mrs Mackenzie about it, but then he practised making long "s's" like Granny, and Alastair had some plasticine, so he forgot.

But Mummy did not write to him. It was Jessie who sent him his clean clothes and wrote to say that his other box would meet him at Acharn. Granny wrote again, and Daddy sent him five shillings. It all made Mummy's silence very pointed, as if she had forgotten.

Paddy met him in the corridor, and said, "I say, I hope your people are all right." Paddy would say that.

John asked "Why?" Then he realised that he was a cow; but it was only because he wondered if Paddy knew anything about Mummy. It was really lies to say "Yes" when you didn't know yourself what was happening. Mummy might have scarlet fever. She might be *dead*. Only somehow he knew she wasn't dead; you feel different if people are dead.

It was the longest term, and there was measles. Only seven boys did not get measles, and John was one of the seven. He was not proud exactly, only he could not help feeling the measles boys were lacking in backbone. It was interesting to watch the rash come out. Pullan's came behind his ears in Scripture prep., and Antrobus had it all up his arm. He showed his arm to John, and it was very interesting, but Mrs Squire came and sent Antrobus upstairs. She gave John a lozenge to suck, but John spat it out. He did not get measles, though Mrs Squire said he would if he talked to Antrobus.

He did not wonder if Mummy had measles, for

grown-ups do not get measles. They get typhus and scarlet fever.

Whatever Mummy had, she did get better, and by and by she wrote a note in pencil, very joking and cheerful. John wrote back in his best handwriting, remembering all the tiresome rules Miss Sykes went on about—indent your paragraphs, leave an invisible margin, space it, put the date. He did all this. It really was a beautiful letter. And it was not all about nothing, either, for he had to tell her that Paddy had asked him to Glenlogie.

It was a return invitation, of course. Paddy couldn't ask Ilay because it was John who had asked him. This is etiquette.

Mummy wrote a note in pencil to say that Ilay was going to spend the holidays with Granny, and how kind of Mrs Murray. So John went.

It is eight miles north of Perth. They drove from Perth in a big black car, rather dilapidated, and without a looking-glass like the Mackenzies'. But there was a tube you could talk down to the driver. You whistle, and he cocks his head round. It was a nice car, but John would have enjoyed it more if there had not been Paddy's relations coming at the end. He hated shaking hands with relations.

It was a relief when he found it was only Mrs Murray and Peggy.

§

They did all sorts of things. They played golf in the fields, and Peggy played too, much better than either of them. Only she was lazy. She was lazier than anyone John had ever seen. He liked lazy people. Mrs Murray took them into Perth in the car,

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and they had lemonade and cakes and saw Pullar's Dye Works. They went to a Rugger match at Glen-almond College, and to a picnic at Crieff. This was all very nice. And Paddy taught him to smoke.

Paddy knew all about it. He showed John how to shake down the tobacco, and which end. And how to hold it. John followed the directions very carefully, and it did not make him feel sick at all, only surprised. Paddy said it was all tosh about people being sick. Ilay said this too. That was books again. On the whole, books are not truthful.

After a time it was wet.

It rained and rained, and they went all over the house looking for something to do. They had played pool and Double Demon, and there did not seem anything else left, except to muck about and look at books.

John found some photograph albums. He did not reveal this to Paddy at first, because he was afraid Paddy might tell him all about his relations. He often did this. He thought it was very interesting, and John generally bore up.

But he decided that he would look at these albums by himself. There were Paddy and Peggy and Mrs Murray, and a man rather like Paddy, and a lady whom John thought he knew somehow, only he did not see how he could. But presently he did speak to Paddy. He said, "Who are these chaps?"

There were two chaps. They looked nice.

Paddy said, "Oh, that's Uncle Robin. He's in the Indian Civil, you know. Rather a burly fellow."

Uncle Robin was the standing up one. There was another chap too, sitting astride a chair and leaning over the back. John said, "Who's the other one?"

"I don't know," Paddy said. "Half a tick; perhaps it says on the back."

John took it out. But there were only initials on the back. "R. F. M., J. L. M. 1893."

"Same initials as mine," John said.

And at the same moment Paddy said, "He's rather a burly chap, isn't he?"

But John did not think the young man was a burly chap. He did not want to call him that. He had hair like John's, that got untidy, and he looked as if there had been a high old rag somewhere not long ago; because he was smiling, only not very. For some reason or other John did not want to talk about him. He wanted Paddy to go on about something else, and to be able himself to come back alone and look at the photograph again. Because there was something he couldn't remember. He looked out at the rain splashing, and back suddenly at the photograph. And it seemed that if he was by himself and looked away often enough he might remember about it. The harder he looked, the less he knew. He looked while Paddy was talking, and at the end he did not know anything about the young man at all.

Sometimes if you think too hard of a thing, it is not there. Once, without particularly meaning to, he had thought of the word "canary," and presently it seemed as if he had made the word up, and there were no canaries at all. It was the same with the young man.

Paddy might have left this alone, but he did not. He got the photograph out, and there was talking and a fuss.

Mrs Murray knew. He was John's uncle. She had known all the time, and she looked like people look

when they are really amused. She did not say much; not much about him.

His name was **Mush**. He was not christened **Mush**, only they called him that.

She said, "Let's see. Ilay Menzies wasn't at Dunrobin, but another brother was—contemporary of my boy Shafto—what was the name, Lancelot, Ludovic?—Ludovic, that's it. You've got an Uncle Ludovic? Yes; well then, he and Shafto were at Dunrobin. Ring the bell twice, Peggy, the idiot's deaf."

That was all then, but she went on afterwards. She knew all about John's relations; much more than he did. People do in Scotland. Shafto knew the Gordon-Lathams, and someone went to stay with old Lady Something in Shropshire. And Ludovic went wild-duck shooting with Mike Gordon-Latham, but John could not make out whether this was in Shropshire too. It was rather muddling. Ilay Menzies was Daddy, of course.

There were so many relations that she seemed to forget about Uncle **Mush**. She did not tell John anything about him anyway. But it was he whom Daddy had said was thick with young Robin Murray at Oxford. He was the boy. That was clear.

What wasn't clear was the feeling John had, when he looked at the photo, of remembering something. But there couldn't be anything to remember, because Uncle **Mush** had died many years ago, before John's day.

§

If you follow the burn far enough, you come to Loch Lhui.

One afternoon they did. It was Paddy's idea, and

it roused even Peggy, because you can boat on Loch Lhui. They carried their tea; Peggy carried most of it, marching along the bank, swishing flies away with an ash branch, while Paddy and John leapt from stone to stone up the path of the burn.

In crossing under a bridge they met a party of people; the people were on the bridge, and looked over at John and Paddy underneath. John had to talk while they were looking—about school and Swoggs and Prodger and Bruggins in familiar tones. Prodger was Pullan's nickname, and John was not allowed to call him that, really. But it didn't matter, because the people didn't know, and they were listening. He called Paddy "my dear chap."

The sight of Loch Lhui's smooth black surface unnerved him a little, especially after Paddy's remark about depth.

"Hundreds of feet in the middle."

Peggy said, "That's an exaggeration." She spoke so slowly that the long word sounded longer than usual.

Paddy said, "My dear girl, it was only Uncle Raymond who told me. Only Uncle Raymond. I suppose he isn't likely to know—"

"Oh, do shut up and get in," Peggy said in a weary voice, and John wondered for a minute if she was bored. But that couldn't be, because if she was bored she must be bored by Paddy.

It was a pretty nice afternoon. They rowed about and saw somebody's cave, and had tea on one of the little islands. Two of them rowed and the third one steered.

After tea Peggy said, "I'll row." She meant with both oars. In some ways it is easier, particularly with Paddy.

"And then I will," Paddy said.

"Well, you'd better wait till we get close to land if you're going to row double."

"But I *can* row double."

Peggy did not answer, and rowed off very smoothly and evenly. Even John could see she did it well. For a while there was peace, while Paddy steered, and John lay in the bows with his hands behind his head; until Paddy leapt to his feet without any warning and said, "Now let me have a go. John can steer."

The boat wobbled, and Peggy remarked, "Well, look out," while John held on with both hands. A short argument followed, which ended in Peggy jumping over into the steerer's seat; John was glad of this, for when he steered things bumped.

"Idiot you are," screamed Paddy; "look what you've done." She looked; an oar had been knocked overboard and was floating rapidly away. Paddy rowed back very curiously and streakily, and overshot the place; the bow of the boat hit the paddle and it sank. Paddles don't sink really. They bob up miles away, only Paddy forgot this. He said, "I can see it," and reached over with the other oar, while Peggy leant over the side up to her elbows in water. They both seemed to have forgotten John. He hoped they *had* forgotten him, because he was holding on, and you don't hold on in a boat.

What happened then was very quick. John held, but the firmness slipped away, and the water was very loud. It rushed and gurgled, and everything was very light and then very dark. A voice was shouting something miles away, beyond the hill that Paddy called the Teapot, only he couldn't hear because of the awful water. He *had* to get out of the awful water. And at

the same time he wanted to ask Paddy why the hill was called the Teapot. They were holding him, and he was fighting to get free and away from it. All the skin had come off his hands.

He did not want ever to think of that afternoon again. He could not remember how he had behaved or what he had said; only he knew that Peggy must have thought he thought he was drowning, and there was no drowning in it really, because you could almost wade to shore. Paddy said so. He *had* thought he was drowning. And Peggy must have thought him an ass and laughed at him, because she never spoke of it again. When a person isn't very much of an ass, you laugh with them at it; but when they are what John had been you never say anything.

And afterwards he remembered it was the same feeling he had had years before when he would not walk out to sea at Arming. It was the awful water.

Paddy talked about it. He came in half dressed to see how John was getting on. He said cheerfully, "That *was* a do. I say, my flannels are simply done for. It was all Peggy, you know, really. If she hadn't hooshed over the side like that we shouldn't have gone in. Pretty foul boat, too."

It did not seem to John that the blame should be put on Peggy. But he did not say so; he wanted Paddy to stop talking about it. Paddy said too much.

§

That day was extraordinary altogether. Some days are like that. It is surely enough to be drowned—well, not to be drowned; but John was waked up in the night by a light flashing and a noise. He lay for a

minute listening, and then he turned his back to the window. It cut right across the sky. He knew why electric light was that colour. It is all right when it is electric light but queer and exciting when it is lightning.

It came about once a minute. And before it came for the fifth time the door squeaked softly and it was Paddy. He got in. They lay talking about all kinds of ordinary things, particularly ordinary. They discussed Sword Two's chance for the second cricket eleven. Now and then Paddy said, "Jove! that's a good one." And John would pretend to look for the next, but really his eyes were shut tight, so tight that he could only see a flicker.

It was very hot, and Paddy made it hotter when he went to sleep. John wanted to get out and prop the bed-clothes up like a tent so that the air blew in, but he couldn't make Paddy move. He was like a log, and he had cuddled up close to John, which John did not like. He never liked things touching, and bodies are so hot in a thunder-storm. He shoved Paddy away as far as he could.

Then a queer thing happened. He thought of the green baize board, suddenly: he was standing and seeing O'Farrell, and the board was topping, like it had never been before. It still would be topping if he went back and looked at it that minute. For the name O'Farrell still made him feel as he had felt then; and at the same time O'Farrell was Paddy and he was trying to shove him away. And when he got to that point the feeling went.

He couldn't explain it, except by saying that O'Farrell was not Paddy. And that was foolish, and Paddy would laugh; only it was true all the same.

VI

JOHN was now in the lowest class of the Upper School. He had left all his friends behind, Mannerling, Antrobus and Sword Two in the Fourth, Mackenzie One in the Fifth, and Mackenzie Two stuck fast in the Sixth. The Sixth had Miss Cheshire, and Mackenzie Two really had tried to get his remove, only no luck.

John had got quite away from the mistresses now. He did not learn music, so he didn't have Miss Sykes even for that. It is more fun when you come to the masters; it was decent standing round Mr Chevasse's desk hearing the news, cricket and things—or talking about chances for the Shooting Eight.

Lessons were pretty mouldy, but then they always had been. There were reams of Latin, of course, and they did English now as well—not grammar, just English. They did Milton. You do Milton by reading *Lycidas* and *Comus*, and looking at the notes whenever it says A or B. Then you learn the notes and read it out loud in class. John always remembered Carey staggering through the prologue in *Comus*:

“The g-g-gug-gilded car of day
His g-g-gug-glowing axle—”

It was idiotic letting Carey read it, because he never could say “g's.” John thought he might have liked

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Milton if they had not read him in class. He liked "The Star that bids the Shepherd fold," and he liked

Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting

until it got to

Sabrina fool,
Listen where thou art squatting,

which it very soon did, and then he did not like it any more, and grew very tired of it as well. You do in class.

It is hopeless to try to like anything in class. Some chap is sure to play the jay.

But there was something that term which he did like. He found it quite by accident when he had been sent by Mr Chevasse into the library to fetch a large book on *British Birds and their Habitat*. He did not hurry, for there were many interesting things in the library—reports and letters on the table, envelopes which one was supposed not to touch. Some chaps took the reports out of the envelopes and looked at them, but John did not do this. It was only the mid-term report, and you are not damned finally by mid-term.

As he was looking for the *British Birds*, he saw *Selected Poems of Francis Thompson*. And that was funny, for Mr Paget had spoken about Francis Thompson in chapel only a day or two before—something about hunting or hounds—and John had wondered then if it was any relation to Francis Thompson who lived at Morden. He hadn't realised that he was a book. There was no particular hurry, so he took it out and opened it. He saw this:

Where is the land of Luthoray?
Where is the tract of Elenore?
I am bound therefor.

There were steps outside, and the book shut. It was a new book and had not been opened wide; some of the pages were not cut. But he found the place again.

Where is the land of Luthoray?
And where the region Elenore?
I do faint therefor. . . .

Half-way down the corridor he had to go back, for he remembered that he had forgotten all about *British Birds and their Habitat*.

§

It was queer to be going home for the holidays. He hadn't been home for eight months; and it was queerer still when Ilay met him in the hall and murmured, "Not a word. Sh!" Then he became mysterious and would not say any more. He would not even say what hair stuff he had put on his hair, though John wanted to know very much.

There was no point in staying with a mysterious Ilay, so John went upstairs to find Mummy. But there was no one in her sitting-room, only a litter; and there was no one in her bedroom—indeed it looked empty and clean, as if no one had slept there for ages. He stood uncertain; he shouted "Mummy!" and a house-maid scuttled away. Then he leant over the banisters and called to Ilay, "Where's Mummy, Ilay?"

Ilay started to come upstairs slowly. Every step said, "What a cow you are, bawling." When he joined

John on the landing, he said in a clear, level voice, "What d'you mean? Mummy's at Arming."

John knew, of course, that Mummy had been at Arming. She had written to him often. You go to Arming when you have been ill. "But she isn't at Arming now?"

"She *is*, you pie." That was Ilay's latest, evidently.

"But she's coming back soon?"

"Not that I know of," Ilay said. "My God! I should be surprised if she did." "My God!" was evidently Ilay's other latest. He generally had two.

"But she *is* coming back, Ilay?" And John did try, but he could not keep the high, wavering note out of his voice that comes when you are afraid.

"I don't know."

John stood still on the landing. He was frightened, but he would not let Ilay see. Nothing had ever been like this before. Mummy had always been there, though you might not see her very often; and now he wanted to see her more than he had ever done, even though he was past eleven and in the lowest class (or more likely next term the lowest class but one) of the Upper School.

Ilay was looking interested.

John would not ask any more questions. He went into his own room with what books call a lordly air, and Ilay followed.

"I don't wonder you're flabbergasted if you hadn't taken it all in before," he said conversationally.

John did not say anything.

"It's made the hell of a row," Ilay went on, "that's all *I* can say."

John brushed his hair.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," Ilay said quite good-humouredly, and went out.

Later on he told John all about it.

John asked how. Ilay said, "Oh—one knows. I got a good deal out of Palmer—Jessie wouldn't let on a word—and Simmy was pretty useful—Granny's Simmy, you know, at Crowthorne. Between the lot I made it out fairly well."

This is what Ilay had made out. There had been a baby. It was Ilay's and John's brother. But it was dead. And Mummy had gone away. Ilay said she was frightened. It was Mummy being frightened that had made her go away.

And John had not known.

He did not understand it. He could not see why anyone should be frightened of a baby, only, of course, he would not ask. And it had died. Mummy hadn't been unkind to it? *Daddy hadn't?* They were his own father and mother, who sang "He shall have a fishie," and wrote him notes in pencil, and he was thinking these awful things, these foul things.

§

The holidays were dull.

Daddy came now and then with men to shoot, and John looked at him and thought—what he had thought. But Daddy was not overcome with remorse; he talked and smoked and pulled John's hair. He pulled it a good deal, as if he found John funny.

John did not find Daddy funny.

He did not like Ilay just then either. Ilay said, "I say—you know about babies." And then he told him several things which John did not understand;

he lay awake at night once or twice trying to make them out. They were not nice things. They might have been nicer if he had understood properly, but of course he did not ask Ilay.

Ilay was out a good deal too. He went out with the shooters, and John was alone for hours. It was boring. He was glad when the holidays were over and he could go back to Acharn.

Ilay had nearly made Mordenstair a wrong place. But not quite, because you couldn't. Even Miss Slingsby had not been able to.

He got his remove. He was in Class Two, only one class behind Paddy. Paddy said, "Burly effort." He did not mind John being only one class behind him.

You had to work in Class Two. Mr Brent took it mostly, and Mr Chevasse for maths. Very often it worked with Class One. They had written geography questions; then they had to change books and correct each other's. If you do this, you are supposed to do it fairly. John had Paddy's. The answers were nearly all wrong, and Paddy had written at the bottom, "Give me ten whatever you do." John knew what he meant: if you get less than ten marks you were returned. He did not know what to do.

Paddy had only got four marks, really.

Then Mr Brent said, "Marks, please," and John wrote "10" underneath Paddy's answers. He also wrote in one or two things that Paddy had missed, in case Mr Brent saw.

When Mr Brent said "O'Farrell," John said "Ten."

It was the minimum. The maximum was twenty-two. Mr Brent said, "O'Farrell, this won't do."

Paddy got his book back, and rubbed out what he

had written. Then Mr Brent took all the books in. It was lucky he had not done it before.

And Paddy said to John, "Saved. Stout fellow. I must learn my prep. next time." He did not, though; he did a jigsaw puzzle next geography prep.

Mr Brent did not know any of these things. He said the First Class would scorn to alter marks. So they would, of course; big marks. You never altered marks a master had given you.

There are all kinds of rules of things you must not do—not masters' rules at all. By and by you know them. John knew them now, because he was in Class Two.

§

Mummy wrote and said he was to come to Arming for Christmas.

So he did. They were not at Crowthorne, where, anyway, there would have been books, but in lodgings on the sea front. It was dull. They spent Christmas Day with Granny, and he thought all the time that they wanted him not to be there so that they could talk. They did talk sometimes quietly, while he was reading; and then Granny raised her voice and made it sound all cheerful and horrid when she spoke to him.

Mummy was cheerful too. She did not say anything about the baby who was John's brother. John did not want to think about the baby after what Ilay had said. He tried not to.

On the Sunday evening after Christmas Mummy wanted to go to church.

She said, "Come to church, darling?"

He did not want to. He was reading the *Book of Dreams* which he had found in a corner of the sitting-

room. If you dream of calves it means a marriage, and if you dream of goldfish it means disease of the stomach. Why it should mean this, nobody can say; especially as John distinctly remembered dreaming in the term of kneeling by the bathing-pool and catching goldfish in his hands. It had been quite a pleasant dream, and he had not had to go to Mrs Squire the whole term, except when he cut his wrist. So that is not true.

"Oh yes, come along," Mummy went on, as he was opening his mouth to say he did not want to. "A walk will do you good."

This is a fatal remark, because boiled fish and prunes also do you good. But John went, because one has to.

They went inland for the walk. They went down the Parade and along Lauderdale Road, but not to the church at the corner because the parson was too long; and then into College Road, which John liked because there were the College boarding-houses and you could look in and imagine chaps going to the College. And then they turned to the left and round College Gardens to St George's.

He had never been to St George's. They had gone to Granny's church on Christmas Day. Churches are dull.

St George's was dark inside, and there was a queer smell, not a church smell, a nice one. There were chairs instead of pews. He was used to pews, and he felt slightly suspicious of St George's. But there were old ladies looking just the same as the old ladies in Granny's church; and there were girls in dark blue, a school or something. It seemed all right, really; it

was only the chairs and the smell. Mummy said "Incense" in his ear.

The choir were interesting. They wore purple gowns. There was one fairish boy rather like Husack, and one with queer eyes, and one with bright hair that stood on end and made John feel sympathetic. They did not look like the boys at Granny's church, who wore india-rubber collars and howled in the road. They looked as though they might be quite decent chaps. He could not always attend to them, though, because the Psalms were peculiar, and unlike anything that had ever been before in church. It seemed unlikely that the choir would know what to sing next, because some person began and then they sang something quite different. They did know, though. They were quite calm, and so were the old ladies and the girls in blue. The hymns were different too. As a rule John found hymns tosh; it is only the tune that matters. Who can make any sense of "There is a blessed home beyond this land of woe"? One does not want to sing anything through endless days. John didn't anyway. But these hymns were decent. One began

A great and mighty wonder.
A full and holy cure!

That meant Christ being born. It was jolly. So was

In thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light

He sang that one. He liked singing it.

At the end there were carols. They were queer but nice. One of them sounded like Latin, something about

Virgine, only they pronounced it the other way, like *gow-de-ah-mus*. And he thought he heard "hodie," which is "to-day."

Mummy did not say much on the way home. She took John's arm, and he let her.

She had taken a card from the porch with the list of Christmas services. John looked at it, and the service they had most often was Mass. He knew Mass. They did it at school in church history. It is the Communion. Only when it is Mass it becomes interesting like looking at Francis Thompson. Communion is dull, only the end of the Catechism.

He thought he would go to Mass, and see if it was exciting and if the boys were there. But it was terribly early, always at seven and eight in the morning.

He woke one morning at five, and could not go to sleep again. He did not really mean to get up. But it is a queer thing that if you do not make up your mind to get up, you are more likely to get up than if you do. He thought this. It is a muddled thought. But if he had said, "I will get up at seven," most likely he would have been lazy and slept till half-past. So he did not say it, and he did get up.

He washed in cold water. Cold water makes you feel as if you had never been to bed. The servant was cleaning the front doorstep. She did not matter. When he got out he ran.

As he ran, he realised that there would have to be a new group of boys, because it would be necessary to astonish the boys of St George's, who probably thought too much of themselves. It was more exciting than the Thomasons had been in the old days.

He wondered if the St George's boys ran to church.

But they had not run that day. There were no boys at Mass. It was a swiz.

He sat in a corner and looked at the big cross with Christ on it. When he looked at it long enough, a sort of haze came and the cross seemed to move. And the air in the church moved too.

When everything is quiet you can hear the sound of silence.

Next day he went again, because he thought the boys might go every other day. He did not go up to the altar, of course. Some people did. But there were no boys.

So he knew it was no use going to Mass.

On Saturday Mummy went to Crowthorne and did not take him with her; so he went to church at five in the evening to see if the boys were there.

The boys were not there. But something happened.

§

Something rather exciting happened. A priest spoke to him.

He knew that you called them priests. (Mr Paget was not a priest, he was a clergyman.) He had a gown on and the cape thing and the hat with the button; he touched John on the arm and John jumped. He had not meant to jump so hard.

The priest said to John, "I've seen you before. Come and speak to me after the service, will you?" He did not whisper, but said it low. And he said it, he did not ask it. Then he went away into the chancel with mighty strides.

He left John undecided. It was a great chance, and one he might never have again, because all names were

open to him. He planned all through the service what to say; he seriously thought of David Garnett, only he liked Neville very much. Neville O'Farrell had too many "I's." He had not made up his mind when the whole thing was over and the priest came out and nodded to him.

He made John come. The lights were down and one or two ladies were still kneeling at the chairs. John fell over a hassock. The priest went through a door, and John too, and down a short passage past a room with an oak door and surplices hanging. As they passed a boy came out and went the other way. He looked at John, and John looked at him; he was the boy with the bright hair which would not sit down. John wondered if he damped the brush, and if it was no good at all. Then he was in a small room with a table and some carved chairs. One of the chairs had faces. The priest sat down in one, and John was to sit in another. He sat.

The priest was breezy. People are breezy in books. He said, "Living in Arming?"

John said "No."

"Staying in Arming?"

John said "Yes."

This did not go very far. Probably the priest had expected John to say more.

He said, "You—er, I've seen you in church. Yes."

John said "Yes." He did not say anything else, because he was trying to decide about his name.

"Look here," the priest said, and he suddenly seemed able to talk. "Don't be afraid of us. Boys aren't afraid of us. We have plenty of boys here, and that's why I spoke to you. I was wondering, if you were staying in

Arming for some time, whether you would like to join the Guild."

John nearly said, "I'm not staying for long." But suddenly he realised that most likely the boys belonged to the Guild. A guild is a society. So he did not say anything, and looked at a jug of water on the table. The water was rocking, because the priest kicked the table with his knee.

He went on, "All our boys belong. It means just a few simple rules, and coming to Mass when you can." He held as if by magic a small brown book in his hands; it had a gold cross on it, very thin.

John knew about societies. The Waifs and Strays is a society. It is stodgy. The red-haired Colquhoun girls had a bazaar. He did not want to join a society, and at the same time it was a guild and the other boys belonged.

The priest opened the book. There was a blank space for your name inside. And John did not know what his name was going to be. The priest had dipped his pen in the ink and was sitting with the pen over the space before he made up his mind.

Then he had a sudden inspiration. "Patrick Neville Menzies." It sounded rather a decent name.

The priest wrote this down. He believed it. Then he said, "And age—what is it? Thirteen?"

John said, "Nearly thirteen."

It is surprising to be taken for thirteen when you are eleven. And he had almost told the truth, for he had said he was nearly thirteen, and eleven is nearly thirteen.

The priest wrote "Patrick Neville Menzies, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$." Then he said, "Who are you with in Arming?"

John said, "With my mother."

"God bless mothers," the priest said.

John went home feeling mixed, for he had joined a guild. If you are a priest you have to make people join guilds; it is part of the job. Clergymen jaw, but the priest hadn't jawed. That was all to the good.

But he had said, "God bless mothers."

A guild has rules, and John would have to keep them. It sounded as if it might be rather a nuisance; but on the whole he was glad, because of the other boys.

§

He put the book in his Prayer Book, and took it to church on Sunday. It was Mass, of course. You have to take grace and give something in return. There were questions printed with the Commandments, and he read them very carefully, because they were the sins and you had to confess them. But the list was disappointing, because as far as he knew he had not committed any sins at all, and yet that was ridiculous, for all men are sinners. It would have been jolly to have a good long list and then repent properly. As it was, he had to say "No" to most of the questions—all except Pride, Vain and Wandering Thoughts, Greed (he had finished the chocolate shape) and Slothfulness. And just at the end he remembered, and was glad to remember, that he had certainly deceived the priest in thought, word and deed about Patrick Neville Menzies. So he repented of that.

But this was not really interesting. It did not seem likely that God would bother much about his deceiving the priest. The choir was much more intriguing.

When it came to the anthem he forgot all about sins and everything.

"Lo! star-led chiefs Assyrian odours bring."

That was all he could hear, but there was an organ accompaniment that ran down like water. He listened to the notes running down like a stream, and looked at the boys—the big dark boy at the end, the boy with the queer eyes, the boy he had seen the night before, with the thick, bright hair. There were small boys too, in white, with gold bands around their middles, who seemed to be in attendance on the man with the incense. They stood one on each side of him, and sometimes they all went out to do doubtless something intensely interesting in the vestry. Presently John repented for a little, because these were vain and wandering thoughts. Altogether, with repenting and looking at the boys, he had seldom spent a more intriguing or (on the whole) enjoyable morning.

Mummy met him on the way home; she hadn't been to St George's, which was rather a mercy. John let her take his arm. She trod on his foot and said, "Oh, pardon, darling!" "Pardon" is like putting your fingers in the salt. But he did not look annoyed, or he hoped he didn't, because of the Guild.

The Guild was a bit of a bore on the whole. Mummy did not make it any easier. It was not even a success when John denied himself a second cup of tea, because she had rung for more water and wanted it used up. And the walks were awful. She would say, "Shall we go on the Parade?" and he had to say "Yes" pleasantly. But it was a bore. The Parade was not at all interesting, and it is always difficult to feel good when you are bored—much harder than it would be if there was anything really wrong tempting you. (The book said there would often be wrong things tempting you. It is a mistake. He found this out.)

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And Mummy was tiresome too. She didn't seem to listen to half he said; her attention would wander, and she would go on talking with gaps and pauses while you knew she was thinking of something quite different. Then he would talk about school, and she would say "How dreadful, darling," or "Quite nice." After a time John didn't bother; he would have an exciting scene in his mind with that wonderful army of boys who were to surprise the boy with the odd eyes, and the big boy, and the boy with the thick hair.

VII

HE went back to school prepared to find life a battle-ground. One does. It would be easier at school than at Arming; rather splendid, in fact. He was looking forward to it. On his last Sunday he started making resolutions; he put himself on his honour not to think about outside things, though it was a thorough nuisance, because he had nothing to think of, and it was almost certain that the choir were eating sweets.

The difficulty at Acharn, though, was to find the battle-ground. It did not seem to be there. Everything was ordinary, and you did your work, and some of the chaps used pocket combs and some used swear words; but John did neither the one nor the other, so he couldn't renounce them. And Mr Brent had given up the changing books system, so he couldn't refuse with flashing eyes to doctor Paddy's geography marks. It would have been difficult to refuse anyway, without saying that you belonged to a guild. In books boys stood with clenched teeth muttering, "*I'd die sooner.*" This was when chaps brought them stolen money to conceal. It would have been the thing, though not easy in front of Clayton or Mannering or the Mackenzies. Also, in books chaps said their prayers and other chaps put cold sponges down their backs in the middle of the devotions. This does not happen in real schools.

The only way to show that you belonged to the Guild

was to deny yourself things you wanted to do. He did this occasionally, when he did not want to do the things very much. He took the smallest egg several times at breakfast: once he gave his egg up altogether, but this was not a success, for Garden Three got two.

§

He was to spend his Easter holidays at Mordenstair. Mummy gave him the choice, and he chose; and it was not the harder of two ways, because he wanted to see Ilay. Ilay was a beast sometimes, but still he was Ilay. And Arming was too dull; except for St George's, it was terrible.

Ilay met him in the car at Morden. He brushed his hair right back now, like Clayton; he was very sleek and smart and more like Daddy than ever.

He seemed pleased to see John. It's damn boring when you're down south. We did have a thin time last hols. I wonder Pa didn't take to drink." This was decent of Ilay, if not true.

They dined with Daddy in their tartans—the Menzies dress tartan, very red. John was always slightly in awe of Daddy—not afraid—though he tried not to show it. You never quite knew what Daddy would be at next. He was awkward for the first minute, when he seized John by the chin and turned up his face, remarking, "Hullo, what have we here?" It was uncomfortable. Daddy's eyes were like needles, or like eagles. Then he laughed and said, "Yes, old Jorrocks, *I* know all about it," which made John wonder for a minute if Daddy had seen the brown manual. However, it did not seem to mean anything, and they went in to dinner.

It was a proper dinner. At school there were biscuits

and milk before your bath, and at Arming bread and butter and potted meat and cocoa—kids' food. But here it was the real thing—six courses and five kinds of fruit, and John had two helps whenever he wanted to. Mummy would have said, "That's enough, darling." It was first-class. After dinner they sat in the lounge, and Daddy did curious things with smoke rings; he tried to teach Ilay to do them too, only Ilay laughed too much. John read *Punch* in the kind of armchair one does not get much chance to sit in.

Presently Daddy went away to answer a telephone call or something, and did not come back. So they went to bed.

Ilay wandered in while John was undressing, to look at things.

"Are you pi, Jonathan?" he asked suddenly.

John said, "No, rather not," in some haste, and turned to see Ilay looking at the Guild book.

"Mind you," Ilay continued seriously. "I've got nothing to say against it. I'm not pi myself, but I know several chaps who are." He looked at the page which the priest had filled in. "I say, old thing, you are going it. Is it an R.C. show?"

"No, it's a church at Arming," John said, thanking his stars that he had scratched out Patrick Neville, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$. He had done this as soon as he got home, while the ink was wettish. It was providential.

He told Ilay a little about the Guild. He made it sound rather exciting, and Ilay seemed to think him a bit of a dog.

Presently he strolled off, and John undressed slowly. Looked at in retrospect (this came out of the manual), the evening did not seem a success; he had not given

up anything at all or taken the harder of two ways.
And he had eaten too much dinner.

He had certainly eaten too much dinner.

It hurt. He tried to find a position in bed where it did not hurt. . . . He thought of Daddy seizing his chin and looking at him as if he knew something. He could feel Daddy seizing his chin. Each seize was like a pendulum swinging. He was nearly asleep. But something was keeping him awake.

§

Ilay was rather pleased with the idea of the Guild. He took it into his head that old Jonathan was inclined to be a bit pi—though John had never said so—and became a nuisance. He did not laugh at him—this would not have been so bad—but he was encouraging. He would not lead John into temptation. It was futile.

John had to fight it. To be treated as a fool is bearable, but to be treated as a budding saint is quite impossible. Ilay would probably look sympathetic if John refused more pudding. So John never did refuse more pudding; the uncomfortable feeling came quite often those holidays.

They did not see much of Daddy. Where he was John didn't know at all, but he rather thought Ilay did. Sometimes he would come in and say, "Let's do something." And that generally meant a theatre or a cinema, which was fun, of course. Once it happened after dinner, and they raced into Perth along the dark roads. You felt then that something was really going to happen, only it never did.

When Daddy was away, John read. He wanted to

read every book in the house; he had to ask Daddy about some of them first, of course."

He said, "I say, Daddy."

"What sayest thou?"

"Can I read all the books in the library?"

Daddy was not at all amazed. He pulled John's hair, and said, "Read on." He said something in Gaelic too, but John could not understand this.

So that was all right. John had the freedom in the library and the study and the lounge, and could read anything.

He read Stevenson—*Thrawn Janet* and *The Merry Men*. He could not go to sleep the night after *Thrawn Janet*. It was fine. He read *Plain Tales* and *The Naulahka* and *Flyleaves*, and some of Ossian in watered silk, and *The Scarlet Letter*, which is a Mystery, and the *Bab Ballads* and Rossetti and Keats. And he read a funny little book with a mouldy cover, which began,

Go and catch a falling star.

He took it to bed, because he liked it. It was all scored with pencil marks. The man was a John—John Donne. He liked saying John Donne.

About the middle of the holidays he found a green book called *Leaves of Grass*, by Walt Whitman. He knew Walt Whitman. It was he who wrote "O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done," which he had never said to Mr Paget.

So he read *Leaves of Grass*. It was queer, not like other poetry. But some of it was decent.

Beat! beat! drums! blow! bugles! blow!

It was like that, with an exclamation mark between each word. It was right like that; it made a deafening noise. He liked "O terrible drums."

So strong you thump, O terrible drums. . . .

There were other things he liked, *Who are you, Dusky Woman?* And that was America. And *Pioneers! O Pioneers!*

It was jolly to think of the tan-faced children going out with the axes.

He liked Whitman so much that he read him again next day. He started in a different part of the book. It was quite different. It was called *Children of Adam*.

He thought it might be like *Adam's Diary* by Mark Twain. But it was not at all like that.

It began,

I sing the body electric.

For a minute he thought it was the body of a car, and that it was all about motors. But it was not; it was about strange things. He had known there was something. He had known a lot in a queer way.

Then he heard Ilay shouting for him, and he picked up *The New Arabian Nights* and went out. Ilay wanted to develop photos in the shed. So they did. But all the time John was thinking.

One does think. But what he was thinking was that he would read some more of Walt Whitman.

He did not do it for a day or two; not till it was wet and Ilay had gone to the garage to clean his bicycle. Daddy was at Glenarioch, so Ilay said, and John could do as he liked. He read *The Diary of a Nobody* first, but all the time he could see the green Whitman on the shelf. Then he put the *Diary* away very carefully and went over to Walt Whitman.

He read *Who are you, Dusky Woman?* because he wanted to see "Me master years a hundred" on the page. Then he read *Come, my Tan-Faced Children*

(this took some time), and then very slowly and quietly he turned to the parts called *Children of Adam* and *Calamus*. Then he put the book back. Then he took it down and read some of it over again. Then he went to see about tea.

It told you things. It told you things that other people know but do not tell you.

It did not explain, it told. He wanted to ask somebody questions. But there was nobody.

§

But a strange thing happened that night. He cried. He who never cried. But he did cry then, with his face in the pillow, trying not to make a noise.

And he did not know why.

But in the middle of it he saw a picture in his mind. It was queer. *Lo! star-led chiefs Assyrian odours bring . . .* Eastern scents—bright colours, bright scents, and streams of running water. It was that which quieted him at last, and he went to sleep thinking of the organ accompaniment that runs down like water.

§

School made things ordinary again.

It was Paddy's last term, and sometimes John would try to imagine Acharn without him. But he never could, because Paddy always seemed to be everywhere, talking.

Something interesting did happen, though, because of Paddy. It was on a match day, a big home match. Paddy had been talking about Aunt Beatrice, who was coming to the match if the Maconochies didn't go to

Oban. They would drive her over from Stranraer. John knew this, and then the enemy eleven arrived in brakes, and he forgot all about Aunt Beatrice driving over from Stranraer.

He was scoring part of the time, so he did not see Paddy, who was not playing because it was under thirteen. But in the tea interval, when he was coming back from the house with a message about urns, Paddy saw him and shouted. He was walking with a lady on the terrace. John knew that the lady must be Aunt Beatrice and that she had driven over from Stranraer.

The Maconochies couldn't have gone to Oban.

He wished they had, because he did not want to be introduced to Aunt Beatrice. He wanted to get back to the scoring, because Sword Two was a jay and did it wrong. However, Paddy went on shouting, so he had to go. And as he got near he saw something very interesting.

Paddy said, "This is my——"

"How do you do?" she said at the same moment, and took his hand. John knew she recognised him; he had recognised her at once.

"Paddy, you are behind the times," she went on. "I've met John Menzies before."

"Well, you never told me that," Paddy said, and was aggrieved. "I told you all about Aunt Beatrice, and you never said anything."

"I didn't know she was she," John said, and Mrs Taggart added, "Of course you didn't, and I didn't either for a long time, because Paddy called you John. Besides, it was years ago—years and years. Come along and have tea. Paddy, do they have ices in that shop up the village?"

"No, but they have lemon squash."

They all went up to the village and had lemon squash. John remembered how she had asked him to tea and he had never gone. He wondered if she remembered too, but he did not get a chance to talk, for Clayton and Husack and several other people over thirteen came with them and had lemon squash too. Paddy always asked everyone he saw. The squashes were nice. John had two, lemon and raspberry.

That night in bed he thought of something. It must have been Mrs Taggart who reminded him of it, though he did not think of her first. He thought of the old photographs in the study at Mordenstair, and how he might have looked for Uncle Mush in the holidays. He did not know if Uncle Mush was in any of them, but it seemed as if he must be; and if he was, John knew he would recognise him at once, because he was not like anyone else.

He was a jay not to look for Uncle Mush.

He wondered if Mrs Taggart had known him. But he could not have asked her that, because of Clayton and Husack.

§

There were to be changes at the end of that school year. Lots of chaps were leaving—Pullan, Clayton, Sword One and Paddy—and John himself would be in the First Class. This was astonishing.

On the last evening of all Paddy and John walked round the playing field, and Paddy called John an old sport and several other things. He spoke as if John and he had always been all in all to each other, like chaps in books. It was evening, with rays of sunlight slanting, and the grass was soft and green, and John thought Paddy might be going to die. In books chaps

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generally die on fine evenings. Then he would remember him and look at the green baize board.

But Paddy did not die. He had potted meat for supper, and gave John half.

§

It was strange how Arming had a different feeling at once.

Mummy met him at the station when he arrived at nine o'clock in the morning, having travelled all night, as you generally did from Acharn; and the moment he was on the platform he knew there was such a place as Arming. When you were at Mordenstair there was no Arming at all. You couldn't think of them both at the same time.

All the journey John had made a resolution. It was to ask Mummy about Uncle Mush.

She was the only person to ask. Mrs Murray could have told him things, but she was frightening, besides being in Perthshire. He had lost Mrs Taggart again. And Daddy was quite hopeless; he would have invented a story about Mugwumps in Pottsville, Pa. And John really wanted to know things. He wanted to know if Uncle Mush had been at Dunrobin, and what college at Oxford, and where he had gone to after that. Besides, he wanted to know at once—the next minute.

He did not ask the next minute. It is difficult to ask things when the other person doesn't know you are going to. Mummy had never said anything to him about Uncle Mush, and one feels a frightful fool. . . . He decided to wait till the last day of the holidays. Then he decided to ask her at ten minutes past two. They went for a walk, and while Mummy talked John

was thinking, "When she stops I will do it." Then he decided, "No, it shall not be the next subject but the one after that. The next but two."

This is a fatal way of going on.

But he did do it. He did it when he did not think he was going to. This often happens.

They had walked to the far end of the Parade, and were sitting on a breakwater. Mummy opened her sunshade and John threw stones at a tin can. All at once he spoke, while he was examining a handful of pebbles.

He could, suddenly. He had not thought about it at all.

"Mum, I say, how many brothers has Daddy got?"

"Oh, my dear John, what a catalogue."

"There's Uncle Ludo and Uncle Alastair."

"And there's Uncle Robbie and Uncle Dick. John and Alan died abroad. Uncle Alan's picture is in the smoking-room over the door."

"Yes, I know. There were crowds. Which was the one who went to Oxford?"

"Oh, I don't know. Uncle Robbie went to Oxford. And Daddy did. And one of the younger ones. Is your watch right? Because we ought to be getting back."

So John never heard whether Uncle Mush had gone to Dunrobin. He could not make Mummy say. And he couldn't say that he knew.

It is difficult with grown-up people.

§

"John," Mummy said.

They were sitting on Tollcliff, the big headland that

looks over the sea. John was lying on his side with grass tickling his face; he could hear the waves sucking up pebbles below on the beach. It was a funny, crashy, slooshy sound.

"I want to speak to you," Mummy said.

She said it in the certain way—the way that makes you know you will always hate Thursday afterwards. You would do almost anything to stop it going on. John wanted to sing; there was a tune in his head that the band played in College Gardens—a German dance that some of the violin boys learnt at Acharn. It had words:

*Ist da ein Stulda
Für meine Hulda?*

It has something to do with getting a chair for somebody.

"John," said Mummy, "I'm not going back to Mor-dens-tair."

John was still thinking of the tune. Husack used to squeak it out. It went in thumps.

*Ist da ein Stulda
Für meine Hul-da?*

"You'll have to know it some time," Mummy said, "and you might just as well know it now."

John nearly said, "Why aren't you?" But he changed it. He said, "Aren't you ever?" He was not at all excited.

Mummy said, "No, John, never."

"Are you going to stay here?"

"I've been thinking about that," Mummy said, "and I almost took a little house, but everything's so dear here. I thought of Devonshire—perhaps Minehead or Torquay—no, not Torquay."

"What about Granny?"

"No, not Granny. Alone. It will be a long way. There's another thing too."

They were both calm. They were talking about the future. The future does not matter when you talk about it.

Mummy went on.

"John, if I live in Devonshire it won't be so—I mean I shall have to retrench a bit and go very quietly for a year or two. We shan't be anything like—I mean—well, we shan't be nearly so well off."

"I could leave school," John said.

"But, my dearest boy, what nonsense. You can't leave school yet. It's only the long railway journey."

"I'd like to leave," said John.

"But I can't send you to Dunrobin yet, darling. You see, you're only just twelve. And we shall have to go very quietly for a year——"

"I could go somewhere that wouldn't cost so much."

"Oh, but I shouldn't——"

"And then I could go to Dunrobin afterwards. Or I could go to the college here. It wouldn't be frightfully expensive."

"Oh, but, John, I should hate to— After all, I may be worrying more than I need. If we go away quietly—Let's talk about something else. Look at that wave going in a different direction to the rest."

John was not going to talk about something else. He knew for the first time that he could make Mummy do things.

"I wouldn't mind going to the college." And then he had another thought suddenly. "Or I wouldn't mind going to the choir school!"

"To the *choir* school?"

Mummy was silly. "At St George's. I wouldn't mind going to the choir school at St George's."

"Go where?" There was a pause. Mummy had caught her lip with her teeth. "Oh, John—you wouldn't."

You would never have thought Mummy would say that. But it made John think twice about it. He had said it more or less for something to say—not really seriously.

But she was serious, so he was. He saw suddenly that he would like to go to that school with all the boys who were to be astonished.

"It's a choir school. They board. I know about it."

"But what made you think of such a—I should have thought you were too old." Mummy sounded uncertain but not aghast any more.

"I don't think age matters. Of course they like them between eight and eleven—it says so on the notice. But there's thirty-six boys in the school and they aren't all in the choir. It's a jolly good education on modern lines, and jolly cheap."

"You seem to know a lot about it."

"And I don't see why I can't sing well enough to get into the choir, anyway. I *can* sing."

"You must give me time to think about it, John. I can't decide all at once. Even if they'd take you, which I doubt, it doesn't seem—"

"But you could try. You could speak to the Vicar, or whatever he is. Father Wainewright, his name is. He'd tell you about it. Or there's a curate. I spoke—" He suddenly decided not to. "You *might* ask, Mum. I really do want you to."

And he did. It was quite a new thought, and yet it seemed as if it must have been in his mind a long

time. It was familiar, somehow, and every minute it became more familiar. And every minute he wanted to leave Acharn more.

Mummy got up and dusted her dress.

"Well," she said, and John heard again that she was uncertain. He picked up her sunshade and gave it to her, and his mind said over and over, "She *will* ask, she *will* ask."

He knew she would. She had been funny altogether. She hadn't said, "A *choir* school? My dear John!" Ilay would have said that. "A *choir* school? My good fathead," and screwed up his nose. Mummy had not been supercilious in Ilay's way.

He thought it might be because now they were poor.

He had to go back to Acharn, anyway, for the autumn term.

§

Only one thing happened in the autumn term, besides being in the First Class and writing pages and pages of Latin prose.

He was confirmed. It was a queer thing, but Mr Brent was keen. It was one of his hobbies, like intensive gardening. He thought chaps ought to be confirmed before they went to a Public School, and if their people consented, he had them done. Paddy had not been done, because his mother wrote from India and said not. He was pleased about this.

For some reason Mr Brent seemed particularly keen to get John done. He spoke to John about it. He said, "Now, it rests with you, Menzies. What do you think yourself?" But John did not think anything about it.

If he was done there would have to be a special

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dispensation from the Bishop, because John was twelve. Husack was going to be done, without a dispensation, so John said he would be.

Mummy sent him *God's Table; Talks to Boys*.

Canon Mountjoy did them. He was the parson from Stranraer, and he came out to Acharn for Confirmation classes. There was only one thing about the Confirmation classes which was at all amusing, and this was a riddle Husack made up while they were on their knees praying for guidance, "Why isn't Canon Mountjoy like a telescope?" And the answer was, "Because he never shuts up." Otherwise it was boring. Church and Sacraments and things, and a lot to write out.

Mr Brent was better. He had little classes of his own and gave it to you fairly straight.

It was strange to be one of the big boys. You could not remember how you had become big and yet you were. Two years ago you were a squat.

PART TWO: ARMING

PART TWO: ARMING

VIII

THE chaps were talking. They were talking like the chaps in John's mind.

"Here's the Archangel Gabriel. Oh, sorry; a thousand pardons. My toe, I believe. Bony, assist the Cherub to a desk."

Gabriel said, "Are you all right?" as he passed.

"Oh yes, thanks," John said. And indeed he was. He had to stand and think hard that it was really true. For he was in the common-room at St George's, and the boys were there too—the big dark boy at the end—he was Gabriel—the boy with queer eyes, the boy who was like Husack. Mr Gilfillan had brought him in and told him some of the names; he did not remember perfectly, but somebody was Eden. Then they went on talking (they had shaken hands, of course; the chaps who had to) and John stood and listened.

He would have liked them to hear the boys in his mind talking; more showing off than the real ones. The real chaps *were* showing off. They liked talking like that. It was easy because they all did it.

The entrance of Gabriel, whom he had seen before, made him decide not to move away from the group and stand awkwardly by himself doing nothing. He had as much right there as they had. If he did not speak they would not think about him.

He wanted to speak. He wished Ilay could have been there to talk to. Then the other boys would have stopped and listened.

Presently he would leave the school with Gabriel, and go through the tall, clangng gate; they would walk to Loriston, and the Cherub would be kind. John thought he liked the Cherub; other chaps must like him too, to call him that. He did not make you want to show off. Perhaps you would ask him the names of the boys, and perhaps not.

He had hardly begun to think about the chaps yet. There was enough to do in realising that he was there alone, and that Mummy was down in Devonshire. He had done it. He had made her go. He could make her do what he liked. Living at Arming in a little house with one's mother and going to a day school—it was impossible. One has to be in the school or else board with strangers.

He had had to fight Mummy about it.

And he had won, and was in the common-room. It had shabby desks, but all the same it was on the right side of the street, the side you can live on. He followed it in his mind—footsteps sounding hollow in the paved court—the tall gate with the clang—the wine shop at the corner with the Gothic points—it was a *street*, not a road; the wine shop made it a street—farther down, St George's, quite calm because it knew everything and realised there was no need . . .

Two more chaps came in. One had a pile of books under his chin, and they fell in a shower through the doorway. The other one, who stopped and kicked the books, was the boy with the bright hair.

"Highly funny," somebody said. "My miscue. . . . Full many a time have I accepted your kind offers

in the past, and full many a time do I——” That was the way they talked. The air was full of scraps of conversation as John made his way out of the common-room; he heard a burst of laughter and the words again, “How highly funny.” It was the bright-haired boy who said them; most likely he had said them before. Though probably not about yourself, you always feel that it may be. . . . That chap thought too much of himself. . . . The paved court sounded hollow—cellars, most likely—and the gate clanged, as he had known it would. He could hear the boys singing and talking in the common-room: the window made a bright square. . . . At Acharn they would call that chap a swab. He *was* a swab. He dreamed down the road, and the Cherub ran after him to say, first to the right by the church and then to the right again. John liked the rushing Cherub.

§

Loriston was a villa. A villa is joined on to another house, and Loriston was joined on to High Hope.

It had a little green lawn that was no longer than the long jump at Acharn. Sword One could have covered it—with a take-off, of course. And it had a gate that was heavier than you expected; something was wrong with the hinge. There were steps up to the front door.

Mrs Grant called, “Is that our new boy?” She came into the hall and smiled at him, and he was glad he had not rung the bell.

“All over? And you found your way back alone? I suppose Ralph is at church.” Ralph was the Cherub: Ralph and Gabriel and the Cherub as well. She went on, “Come in and see Christopher for a minute, and then—I should say—bed.”

He followed her to see Christopher.

Christopher was standing in the drawing-room with his hands in his pockets. He was burly and brown like the Cherub—they were burly fellows, really—only he did not look amused and kind, as the Cherub did.

"Christopher—this is Christopher. Christopher, this is our new friend, Jack Menzies."

It is horrible to be called Jack when you are John.

Christopher said, "How d'you do?" without taking his hands out of his pockets. "Mother, did you put away the atlath? I had it out and it's gone." He did say "atlath," because John was listening very carefully.

"I put it in the dining-room. I'll get it."

For twenty seconds John was alone in the room with Christopher. There was nothing in the world that you could have talked to Christopher about. He was just there.

Mrs Grant, on the contrary, would talk about anything. She talked all the time he was having his supper, and then she saw him up to bed, and talked about College and made him put his head out of the window to look at it. Then she said, "To bed, quick, quick, and to sleep!" It was quite clear that she balanced Christopher the other way. Counteracting, it is called.

John did get into bed, but he was not really sleepy. He was thinking about everything. Presently he heard voices downstairs; the Cherub had come in and was talking to Christopher. Someone played a few notes on the piano and stopped. Then they came upstairs and stood talking, John judged in the direction of the bathroom, probably with their hands in their pockets. They talked in level tones, as big chaps do. Small chaps shriek.

John thought of the Cherub. He had burly shoulders

and dark eyebrows, but his eyes were light. Perhaps he had a strain of Semitic blood (this is good, and comes in books). He heard Christopher saying, "Cherub, you're a Jew"—no, Christopher would never say that, nobody would ever call Gabriel a Jew. There was something you liked about him—Ralph Gabriel—you could imagine him in the common-room saying things, shooting squirts about—and the other chaps—highly funny—heady swab—*Lo! star-led chiefs Assyrian odours bring.* . . .

§

He could have written the first morning down word for word.

The slang was different. It wasn't like "jay" and "burly fellow." It was like something you did not know.

"Stand by for divine worship . . . music the hand-maid of the A-arts . . . which I done . . . I suppose you did early on your conversion by the way? By'r lakin, that did I. Celebrated my funny in some style."

This was some of it. John thought, "He's showing off in front of me. If I had a chance I'd give him a surprise." But he did not have a chance to give anyone a surprise.

They went to church. John went too. There was something at half-past nine, and the Cherub, like a kind senior boy, saw that John was paired with Eden. Eden was the boy with odd eyes. There was no point in John's going with them really, only the Cherub meant to be kind.

He asked Eden, "What is it at church?" He was rather ashamed not to know. Sometimes there had

been extra chapel at Acharn, but you did not generally find out why. You did not bother to.

The bright-haired boy, just in front, heard and turned round quickly to say, "My conversion." He said it so fast that John scarcely made it out.

"In other words, the Conversion of St Paul," Eden said. "Dysart labours under the delusion that he's funny." Eden was pompous. But Dysart was not. He said, "Highly funny," and turned quickly round again with a swish of his gown. The boys all wore mortar-boards and gowns slung or skewed round their necks, and John was wishing he was not the only big one in a cap. He forgot about it in listening to the conversation of Eden and Dysart—something about *quis, quis, quicunque* and *qui vis*. It was like dog-Latin, all beginning with "qu." They did not talk to John again.

John thought to himself, "How he *does* show off"; and then he wondered how Dysart had chipped the bit off his tooth which showed when he laughed. He also noticed, while they were showering "*quis*"es about, that Dysart's hair was worse than his own. To do him justice, he kept it as far as possible within bounds; John allowed that. It looked as if no amount of cutting or damping would make it sit down. It was the one point on which he sympathised with Dysart, who was otherwise a swab.

The sung Mass was very great sport. John sat at the side, and was very much interested to see it all at a close view. He could see the small chaps going out with the incense, and he could see the two other priests holding up Father Wainewright's robe when he doused the altar. And he doused the choir and they all bowed to him, and he bowed to them, like when you meet

people in the street. The robe had gold spirals down the back like the shell of a tropical beetle.

They sang a thing without the organ, while Mr Heap beat time by the altar rails. Mr Heap was the organist. He had not spoken to John.

"Ave Maria, gratia plena. Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus."

The "Jesus" was beautiful, very high and bright and soft.

"Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae."

John had the words, so he knew them all. It is all about the Virgin Mary; he could see the back of the Cherub's head, and sometimes when a man moved he could see Dysart watching the beat.

He liked it. It was decent being in St George's with all the boys, and to hear them singing.

"Ora pro nobis, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae,"

and Paul Dysart turning his head to watch the beat.

§

They were decent to him for a day, and then they left him alone.

He could not show off alone. There were no private jokes, no "quis quis" or "by'r lakin." He could not play to the gallery as the others could by making some inane remark which someone else was certain to take up and reply to. He had no partner. You cannot be idiotic alone.

He talked sometimes to the Cherub. He had to show

Dysart . . . There were things you could say about Acharn, footer and hockey and shooting, and jokes about the masters. Afterwards he was sorry, and would have liked to take his words back again, because he realised that you did not talk to the Cherub like that.

There was a good deal to learn. It was so long since he had been a new chap that he had forgotten what it was like, and how decent people are to you at first, and how they ignore you afterwards. Besides, it had not been the same at Acharn, for then he was a very young kid, and there were sets, and the big chaps saw you settle down. Here there were no sets, and he was a biggish chap himself. People do not help biggish chaps who are new: they are out of things, and it is no use asking anybody to explain the jokes.

He had to walk to church with one of the supers, and say nothing about it.

Then there was Mr Heap. He had a short, decided manner, and he did not seem to think much of John. You are never at your best before this type of person. John stood in wrong places and found wrong books, and asked needless questions. He was stupid about the music, and once when Mr Heap asked him that about the Psalm . . . He preferred not to think of it. He had seen Eden and Bony look at each other, and Dysart had not laughed, but had looked as if he was going to, which made John want to clout him. . . . He knew they talked him over when he was not there—not the Cherub, perhaps, but Bony, Eden, and Dysart and all the rest of them. Did they call him "a total wreck" and "wreckish," as he had heard them speak of other boys? It seemed only too likely.

9

"Play the patty pans."

"Whatever's that?"

The Cherub looked amused. It was a wet day, and everyone had gathered round the common-room piano.

"Bony means that thing of Dvořák's—why he calls it that the Lord only knows."

"What are all such toys to thee, anyway, Cherub?"
That was Eden.

"Why, don't you remember? 'Tam dignati, pro me pati,'——"

"Well, play the funny." And that was Dysart, of course.

Gabriel flung himself on the keyboard. Quite unexpectedly he began to play softly—*pianissimo*—like a sledge-hammer cracking a nut. It was queer to hear such light music from such a heavy chap. In his confusion, John spoke.

"You do play ripplingly, Cherub."

The Cherub did not reply. But Dysart was ready with a side-hit, addressed to Eden.

"Humble faith and holy love."

"How sweet is the Cherub's sweet lot."

They both laughed, and John stood fuming, because neither of them had addressed him by word or name, and yet he knew they were poking fun at him. He wanted to seize an inkpot and break it, really break it, over Dysart's head. He hated Dysart.

"Topping thing. 'Tui nati vulnerati'—tonk it out, Cherub—'tam dignati, tam dignati——' Eden, yap the tenor, get on with it—'pro me pati, poenas mecum divide.'"

"Oh, that's quite the idea. Let's do it again. You take alto, Bony takes treble.

"Tui nati vulnerati
Tam dignati pro me pati
Poenas mecum divide."

The word "divide" came evenly in on the first three notes of the bar. It slid down.

John said, "Fine," but he said it to himself.

Dysart said, "Hot effort." There was no need for him to think twice before he spoke. He did not look at John, but you felt him saying, "I am waiting for you, my poor idiot." John did not say anything at all.

Marrion came in. Marrion was the chap like Husack.

"Heap says all in and stop that yowling."

John could not help wondering as they went in to singing practice what Ilay would have said if he had heard "Tui nati vulnerati."

Ilay would have said, "What show's this? What show *have* you got into? Good Gawd."

But even though Dysart was a swine, he liked the choir school better than Ilay's shows.

§

John had not known before that you could take music seriously. It wasn't like Latin or maths; it was an accomplishment like dancing or playing golf, and he had always understood that it was a horrid fag. One or two chaps at Acharn had been able to play the *Gipsy Rondo* fairly fast, and Paddy had learnt *The Watchman's Song* and another one called *Wolza*. But no one would have dreamed of ranking music anywhere near, say, fives or gym.

But at St George's it was different. He had not had any real notion how different it was going to be. He had to say over and over to himself, "It's only a *choir*. It's only a *choir*." But it was strange to realise that if there was a hockey match and a choral Mass at the same minute, the hockey match would have to go. John did wonder what Ilay would have said.

The Cherub was his anchor. He explained things on the way home, and sometimes at Loriston, so that Mr Heap never knew the depth of John's ignorance—not the deepest depths. One day John would know a thing, and Mr Heap would be satisfied, and would never guess that the Cherub had told him a minute before. In this way John learnt a great many facts about church and psalms and things that they had never told him at Acharn. Perhaps they didn't know them. And he learnt about time and clefs and a good many other things. The Cherub showed him sometimes on the piano, and when he got mixed he wrote it down. He would lie in bed thinking about simple duple and simple triple. Sometimes he would wake up in the night and think of it.

He wanted to understand all these things because he had a feeling that Mummy didn't think he could.

The Cherub told him people's names too. It is surprising how alike two chaps will look who, when you know them, are not alike at all. He knew Father Wainewright and Mr Gilfillan and Mr Heap; and there was Father Wilcken, who was called Billikin—he had a sandy beard; and Curgenven and Jonah. Curgenven and Jonah were the other choir schoolmasters. Curgenven taught maths, and Jonah's name was Pembroke.

But the priest who had talked to John was not there. He asked the Cherub about him. And when he said

"Guild" the Cherub knew at once, and said it was Father Angus and that he was preaching somewhere. He preached a lot, the Cherub said. And John was glad he was not there, because he was afraid Father Angus would remember that his name was Patrick Neville Menzies.

§

By the end of a fortnight John had picked up the choir school manner and was much happier. The choir school manner was easy when you knew it. You just talked like Heap. John would ask Mrs Grant for the butter just like Heap—very fast and very clear. He learnt the catchwords too: "Ye godfathers!" and "Crumpetty hats!" and "Anywhere there," and "I'm delivering the goods," and scores more. Anything was goods, from organs to inkpots. And once when Eden came to him with a list and said, "Can't understand your funnies," he had remembered to answer, "Highly funny."

There had been a fear then that Dysart would remark, "What dam cheek talking like me." But he did not, and if he had, John was ready for him. He was going to stand no nonsense from Dysart now he had been there a fortnight.

He had private practices with Heap. He never quite knew what Heap thought of him, or if he realised that John had never read music before—or if he had told the Cherub to coach him. James Heap did not give anything away. He was not flattering about John's voice; though after the breathing exercises John was surprised at it himself.

You breathe from quite a different part of you than you would have thought.

Mr Heap may have thought John was so big that there was no time to be lost. Anyhow, in about three weeks he put him into the choir. All those three weeks John had had a private lesson every day.

It was a sweaty effort. You did not say "sweaty" at the choir school, you said "bracy."

"Congrats," the Cherub said kindly when he heard the fact. "We shall have to pray over you a bit, but keep your stomach up."

"Pray over me?"

Several chaps began to talk at once.

"A slight intercession for the dear child's soul. . . . 'Member yours? . . . Full well do I. . . . He's past praying for now. . . . I'll wrestle and pray—I'll deliver the goods. . . . Shut up, P. D. You're converted, let us have no more of it."

Dysart was P. D. John wanted to ask him, "What does it feel like to be converted?" because he was sure the answer was "Highly funny," and then you could rejoin, "I knew you'd say that." But there was no time to deal with Dysart, because Heap wanted him.

Anyhow, he was equal to it. He could deal with Dysart if necessary, because he had been there a fortnight.

That singing practice was rather a success. Heap told him his intonation was not bad, and John saw himself being first soloist at once. One does.

It was surprising how deep the relief was at knowing you were not a dead failure. After all, if he had been useless at singing he could have done something else, gone to the college or something; but he hated the thought of leaving even after a lonely fortnight. It was not only to convince Mummy—it was St George's itself, the red curtains and the paved court and the

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clanging gate—the Cherub and the boys. And something he did not know, but he had known before . . .

§

He went into the choir.

He wrote to Mummy at Vale Cottage, Lyncombe, to tell her this important news, and Mummy wrote back to say, "Dearest, I am just settling in. You will love the little house." And John wrote back and forgot to say anything about the little house at all.

They gave him a purple cassock and a surplice with lace. He put them on for Saturday evensong and felt a fool; but the feeling wore off by degrees. At first you kick up your cassock behind and fall over it in front.

There were also his mortar-board and his gown. He was not sure whether he wanted people to notice him or not. . . .

The service of admission was rather distressing. It happened after Evensong, and the choir stayed, men and all, to pray over him. He was not the only one, which was a slight relief; another boy was being admitted at the same time, quite a small one called Davies. He had a double crown to his head, so that his hair grew different ways.

When you are kneeling your boots feel bigger than ever.

John's attention wandered when the responses were over and he hadn't got to think where to pitch his voice next. He looked at the boys instead of listening to the prayers. It was queer to feel that he knew them all—that a month ago they were strangers—the big dark boy, the boy with the queer eyes—ridiculous. He

could name them all now—the Cherub, the jolly old Cherub, with his chin tilted up and his eyes shaded by his hands; Bony, who was a little like Ilay about the hair; Ernest Barker, who was called Ernest Barker, not Ernest nor Barker nor any other name; Bruce, who was Scotch too (but he was Aberdeen); Eden and Marrion and Hornby and Dysart. There were smaller chaps too, Purefoy and Haggard and Shute and other squirts—but he stopped at Dysart because he began to think of something.

He chased the thought round his head, but he could not catch it. Once he had done it before, only he couldn't remember when. But when he shut his eyes and opened them again suddenly, something almost came into his mind.

§

He was a singing boy—a singing boy at St George's, Arming.

John wished he could have seen Ilay. He would have made him guess; only Ilay would never have guessed. Neither would Paddy or Clayton or Husack or the Mackenzies. They did not know what an Introit was, or a Gradual, or an Office Hymn, and John had known these things three weeks. And he had assisted at Mass (assisted in the proper word) and had not once stood up when he ought to have knelt down. He knew all about it.

He was rather glad Daddy didn't know he was a singing boy. Daddy would have made a face and intoned a psalm.

Probably Daddy thought you did intone psalms.

IX

IT was interesting to come back to Loriston and find the Cherub rolling the path or oiling the gate. Christopher was asked to do these things, but he always had something else to do.

"The gate's squeaking again, Christopher," Mrs Grant would say. "I wish you'd just see to it after tea."

Christopher's answer was always the same in effect. "I'd love to, mother, but I must just get my maths done"; or, "I'd love to, mother, but Willis said I could come in at five." The number of things which Christopher would have loved to do, but was prevented from doing by circumstances over which he had no control, was legion.

So the Cherub did the gate.

The passage from the front door was quite straight. In front was the dining-room and at the back the drawing-room, both on your right. There were no other sitting-rooms. It crowded things up rather, for though there were only Mrs Grant, Christopher, Ralph, John, Josephus the Airedale, and sometimes George (George used to come in to have prep. explained), there were also Christopher's paraphernalia, which were very extensive, and Ralph's and John's paraphernalia, which had to be rather limited because of Christopher's. They always sat in the dining-room after supper, and Christopher did all the preparation he had not accomplished before; and this could be awkward, for if

you spoke you interrupted Christopher at a thoughtful moment, and if you moved you shook the table. Christopher would raise his head then with a weary sigh, "Mother, will you politely indicate to George to refrain from kicking the table with hobnail boots? I find it thlightly dithturbing." John was sorry for George, who was a poor-spirited chap, and appeared to be terrified of Christopher, which was unnecessary. Christopher never girded directly at John, but it was understood sometimes that he was getting at him through George. . . . Then there were the evenings when Christopher would come in and throw his books down, and sit down at the table without saying a word. And there were the very bad evenings when Christopher would elaborately light a candle and retire to his bedroom and Mrs Grant would look unhappy, and John would think the Cherub looked amused, only he was never sure.

The drawing-room was not very interesting, and they did not use it much, except when Ralph played the piano. On these occasions Christopher would sit in an armchair listening critically, though with his irritating caution he would never give himself away. The Cherub would obligingly play things that Christopher liked—Gounod, Haydn, a little Handel, a great deal of Mendelssohn. Left to himself, he would not play these things, but Bach, Brahms, Schumann and Mozart. And he would play things by people that John had not heard of before—Purcell and Byrd, who were English, and Palestrina. Palestrina was fine. He wrote Masses. John liked to listen to the Cherub. He played mostly Church music, and John had his favourites too—*In Tears of Grief*, which was Bach, the "Hostias" and "Lacrymosa" from Mozart's *Requiem Mass*, Brahms'

How Lovely is Thy Dwelling-place. And once he played *Tui nati Vulnerati*, and John heard the "divide" in his mind, and remembered that he wanted to kick Dysart.

Upstairs there were six rooms—Mrs Grant's over the dining-room, Ralph's over the drawing-room, and Christopher's and Fanny's above again. Fanny was the servant. John's room and the extra spare room were behind. Mrs Grant's was the most attractive room in the house, for you could sit in the window and look far up and down the road, and in winter you could see St George's spire. There was a table in the window with books. John had noticed them on the few occasions when he had gone into the room, and they seemed exactly the sort of books which you would have expected Mrs Grant to have—*The Cloud of Witness*, which is full of exclamation marks, *Great Souls at Prayer*, which Christopher had unaccountably once given her on a birthday, *Villette*, *Old Kensington*, and Whittier bound in blue.

Christopher kept white mice in his room, and John occasionally went up to see them, when their owner felt amiable. They lived on the window-sill in a very elegant suite of rooms composed of cigarette-boxes with little doors cut in the sides; they had covered corridors and outside stairways, and owing to this palatial mansion they did not smell at all.

The Cherub remarked on this. He said, "Snark would die of typhoid."

When *they* died, which they occasionally did, Christopher dissected them and looked at their insides.

It was an interesting room altogether, because there were microscopes and strange scientific instruments; and Christopher was as pernickety as an old maid, and

always knew where everything was. But John liked Ralph's room best, on the whole. It had Madonnas and holy children, and little water-colours of St George's mounted in gold, and photographs of the choir sitting or standing about in the Vicarage garden, which were the most interesting things of all.

X

THINGS went on being different.

There was a singing evening, for instance. They had it in the big hall which joined the upper schoolroom; it was rather a nice hall with a parquet floor, and rugs, and Latin mottoes. You wore your best black clothes.

John wanted Mummy and Paddy and Ilay and Mr Brent to be there and see it all. He listened to the conversation as if he were Mummy, to see what she would think about it. And he watched the chaps coming in; the Cherub talking to Father Billikin, and Bony joining them. The word that described Bony was "urbane." Then Scottie and Eden came in together, laughing at something. Then Paul arrived, and was kicking Purefoy One.

John called, "Dysart! I've bagged a seat."

It was a secluded seat. "I want to get into a corner and not have to jore," John explained.

"I'm with you there," Paul said. "Hullo! there's Father-r Angus."

John's heart gave a jump when he saw Father Angus, still looking commanding in a cassock, standing in the doorway talking to Mr Heap.

"So he's come, has he?"

"Cherub, come and sit in front and hide us. You'd hide anything."

Father Angus was not looking their way, but John felt safer with the Cherub in front of him.

They talked. John talked with them, because now he could; about all sorts of things, songs and hockey and anonymous letters. How they got on to anonymous letters he could not remember, but they did, and it was interesting because of the Cherub. Dysart said it was. He said:

"Haven't you heard that historic tale? Geoffrey Eden, tell about the Cherub's anonymi letter. 'Twas the talk of the town."

Eden came and sat down. He knew he could tell a story; you saw it by his nose.

"It was about a year ago when the Cherub's virgin breast was harrowed by the receipt of a letter."

"Oh, the anonymi letter was to the Cherub." John liked saying "anonymi."

"Yes. You shut up. Well, the Cherub got this letter, addressed to the Senior Singing Boy, because the fair Unknown didn't know his name. With trembling fingers he tore it open. He perused it. He——"

"Oh, it was a *she*, was it?"

"We deduced from the script it was a ladle. Ladies and jellybags." You had to let Eden go on like this. "Well, it was signed S. M., and it was to ask who the lad was in the choir fifth down on the right—no, sixth down it was then—anywhere there. Fifth or sixth down on the right, with the something or other I forget the word wig. Stow it, we don't want a row. Well, as neither P. D. nor Marrion happened to have had a haircut for some days, by a process of deduction the Cherub——"

"Did he write?" John asked.

"I always thought it was a ticklish thing to do."

"It didn't give much away, really. Anyway he wrote to S. M. at Ye Post Office to say that it was either

N. or M. as the case may be. And he got a letter back to say which was it? she *must* know, he was so highly like a deceased uncle——”

“Oh, highly funny.”

“It wasn’t a deceased uncle. It was ‘someone I know very well who is now dead.’ She then went on to say, ‘I mean no harm to the boy, but I should like to know something about him.’ She then went on to say ‘how much I liked your solo in church last Sunday.’ ”

“Touching effort. Did you answer it, Cherub?”

“No, I didn’t answer it that time.”

“Rather a swiz. She might have been Dysart’s long-lost grandmother. D’you know anyone called S. M., Dysart?”

“That do not I. Nor want to.”

“And I don’t,” John said. He added, because it suddenly occurred to him, “Except my mother.”

“Menzies, thou pulest.”

John felt he was pulling himself. But Mummy was S. M., of course—Sonia Menzies. The other S. M. would be Susan Monk or Sophia Marshall.

And after that they had to listen to the songs, and Paul had to go and sing himself, leaving John stranded, hoping that Father Angus would not see him and come to ask where the brown manual was. But Father Angus stayed by the piano, talking to the chaps who were singing; he talked to Paul for a long time.

Then chaps sang. They sang solos and duets and trios, mostly of a decent nature. Nobody seemed to mind at all. And Paul sang a song in French. It was a decent song. John knew some of the words because Paul had told him.

"C'est l'heure de repos
L'heure délicieuse!"

That kept on coming in. And further on there was

"Nous apparaît Jésus
Le beau Nazaréen."

He liked Dysart singing it. It was the sort of cool evening thing that you could see in your mind—palm-trees and the lake, and women singing.

"C'est l'heure de repos
L'heure délicieuse!"

It was jolly—the music and the talking and the chaps passing to and fro and the rugs on the polished floor. And there was something else as well. Once when he was alone in the corner he shut his eyes, and for a minute there was something he knew and then he lost it. He did not even know what sort of a thing it was. But it was mixed up with the singing, with palms and blue lakes and bright colours and water.

The choir school made him think of palms and lakes. It was not like that at all really. It was the kind of feeling you get.

XI

THE next day Father Angus came to the choir school.

It was wet, and they were all in the common-room, instead of playing hockey in the field, or chasing each other round the asphalt. The asphalt was nearly under water. And Father Angus came in with the new Guild cards.

John did not notice him at once. He was writing to Mummy, and sharing acid drops with Bruce the Scot, and the acid drops were melting and sticking to themselves and the paper. You bit them off. He did not know anybody had come in till someone said, "Oh, shut up, Father!"

And there was Father Angus, looking like a monk, and very commanding.

People seemed pleased to see him. Eden, Marrion and Ernest Barker surrounded him, and the smaller boys ran to fetch their cards. John understood that cards were filled in, or given out, or renewed, or something, before Lent. And there was something about Confessions, which was very dreadful. He had never caught anybody at it, but he knew some of them did. . . .

Father Angus looked round the room twice. Then he saw John, and John knew there was no hope.

He took John's hand.

"Well, my friend," he said, "we meet again." This was a foolish thing to say, and made Marrion and Barker, who were standing near, look interested. He

went on, "I saw you in the distance the other evening, but I wasn't able to get near enough to speak to you." John disbelieved this. "How very glad I am to see you here. Are things all right?"

John said, "Yes, thank you," rather shortly. He felt short. It is not the proper thing to ask a person if things are all right. Mr Gilfillan would not have done it. And Mr Gilfillan would not have said "God bless mothers" either.

"And now to business," Father Angus said. "You haven't got your book?" This was in a low monotone, like church. "Never mind, I'll fill up a card for you. What's the name? I always like to get the full name if possible. John—Loudoun—Hope—Menzies."

"Some name, Mingy," Paul remarked.

John suddenly remembered that it wasn't his name. It made him want to laugh so much that he had to make faces to stop it. Paul was interested, and asked, "What's the giddy jape? Mingy's laid an egg"; and John said, "It was addled," in the choir school manner, and escaped.

You would never have thought that you would meet Father Angus again and have to tell him your real name.

He went back to his letter as soon as he could, because he was sticky, and he wanted to finish the acid drops. Also, he did not want to talk to Father Angus.

John could not make out about Father Angus. He couldn't make out what chaps thought of him. They never said.

§

And then Mummy wrote and asked about holidays. It was just when John had got settled down and

found out about things. There was a good deal to learn. You did not get into the midst of it for quite a long time; chaps did not teach you the code till they knew what sort you were. There *was* a code. John thought so long before he knew it.

Of course you behaved properly in church. It is done. (Heap had a looking-glass too.) All the same, there was a regular code of signals, like flag-wagging, which neither Heap nor any of the others knew anything about at all. There was an alphabet too, for use with your next-door neighbour. You could carry on quite long conversations if you were a bright lad.

It was not a pious school. There was no doubt about that at all. He hadn't ever really thought it was; nobody looked pi even in church. And it was not the sort of church that is. There was a lot of religion going on, services and dressing up and incense and all that sort of thing; and when you use it up in that way it does not come out in your talk. John thought this. There was Confession, of course, but that does not show either.

In books chaps nail each other and exchange religious confidences—only in the more wreckish sort of book, of course. This is not at all true in real life. If you had been at all pious in your sentiments somebody would have said, "Mingy's delivering the goods," or "The poopstick poopeth," and quite spoilt the effect.

They were playing the College Under Fifteen Hockey Eleven, and he was in the Eleven. He was left half. Also there was St Matthew Passion coming off in Holy Week; he did not know what St Matthew Passion was, but he was led to believe that it was of a sporting nature.

And then Mummy wrote and said, "Isn't it lovely to think how soon the holidays are coming? Are you counting the days?"

John frowned when he read this. They told him he looked like an elderly murderer planning a fell deed. But it was rotten. There was a fortnight's holiday between Easter and Whitsun, and he would have to go down to Devonshire.

Devonshire was wreckish—moors and valleys and things. You have to read *Lorna Doone*. He did not want to go to Devonshire.

But one night in bed he had an inspiration. It was an original thought. It was to write and ask Mummy whether he could ask P. D. Paul was not going anywhere special; he was the sort of chap who does not seem to have any relations. It might be rather intriguing down in Devonshire with P. D.

He wrote to Mummy the next day; it was the same sort of letter as he had written long ago about Paddy, only his writing was better. He said, "Do you mind if I ask one of the boys here down for part of the hols.? We could go for bike rides and go all over the country. I think he would be able to."

He nearly told Paul about it at once, only not quite.

When the answer came, he did not open it for a minute or two. He was planning how he would go straight off to P. D., and what he would say—in a voice as if it didn't matter. And Paul would say, "Ah! but how nice," and "Charmed, I'm sure," and whistle through the gap in his teeth, and John would say, "No, honest," and Paul would believe him, and they would jaw about Devonshire.

Then he opened the letter. It said this:

"**DARLING BOY**,—I shall simply love to have you, but I *don't* think I can manage another boy. This is a tiny house, and we have only one servant who comes in for the day. I do a great deal of the work myself. Besides, I want to see you."

There was more of it, but John tore it into tiny bits and threw it into the fireplace.

Mothers are like that.

§

Easter came, and was interesting. Among other things, Gilly discovered that John had been confirmed, and there was not exactly a row, but a heated argument. Apparently Gilly thought John ought to have told him; and this was absurd, for it was Gilfillan's business to find out. Besides, everyone knows that schoolmasters write to each other and say things—Mr Brent had most likely written to say that John was coming and that English was his only passable subject, and would not one have imagined that the confirmation might have been put in too? However, Bruggins seemed to have forgotten about it, and John most certainly had. It was found out in time for Easter Day, and John went with Paul. He did not mind going, though the whole affair took hours, and you could not have anything to eat beforehand. It was not allowed. You had to go empty, swept and garnished. So they did.

The St Mathew Passion was more exciting than this. It was in church, and there was an orchestra, and crowds of people sang. John liked the first chorus best, where everybody screamed and thundered,

"Come, ye daughters, share my mourning,"

and at the same time a *chorale* went on, and you heard it above all the row,

"O Lamb of God most holy!"

There were only six people singing the *chorale*, and it was astonishing how they could. But that was the Cherub.

He heard the *Requiem Mass* too.

And he heard *The Dream of Gerontius*.

And there was incense and a procession. He was in the procession. He ran into a banner and hurt his chin.

And on the Monday after the first Sunday after Easter he was to go to Devonshire. It was a swiz.

XII

HE travelled to Devonshire alone. It was April and very hot and glorious. The trees were yellowy-green. He had never noticed that things looked like that before; that you could look out of the window of a railway carriage and see fields yellow with buttercups, little trees shining in the sun, and primroses. It was like a song they sang at the choir school,

Why o'er the mountains wander
And leave these charming plains?

He thought of it when he saw the yellow buttercup field. These charming plains. It made something there which had not been there before. There were primroses and moss on the railway banks and under the little trees.

There was a woman from Exeter sitting in the opposite corner of the carriage. She held her handkerchief in a ball in her hand, and every now and then she would dry her eyes and stare out of the window. Once a tear very slowly rolled down her cheek and fell on the window-ledge. John was horrified. It was awful that you should want to cry on a day like that—that you should not care to look at the charming plains. . . . Perhaps they were only a yellow glare that hurt. He was afraid of her, and stared out of the window.

Mummy met him at Lyncombe.

"I've found a friend for you," she told him as they

walked down the hill. "You won't be alone all the holidays."

John said, "Oh!"

"There are several people I know here," Mummy went on. "I met Mrs Hales by chance on the hill. Granny used to know her at Crowthorne, and you used to play with Northcott on the beach, though I don't expect you will remember him."

"I do remember him," John said. "He was a swine." As a matter of fact, he did not remember Northcott at all when he began to speak, but as he spoke he did remember. And he *was* a swine.

"Well," Mummy said, laughing, "his mother says he's a very nice boy now, so I hope you two will make friends and go about together."

John did not answer. She could not expect him to. Then they reached home.

It was called Vale Cottage, and it was on the hill, with trees growing all round it. There was a little hall, and a little drawing-room and a little dining-room opening out of it, all very small and nice. The hall was square. There were three bedrooms, but no one slept in the third.

Lyncombe was a sleepy place. John only remembered the first week in gleams—ladies calling and talking about Madeira—a chemist with Kodak films—a girl with masses of fuzzy hair walking past. He did not really wake up till he found himself having a row with Mummy.

It was a real row. It was about the Vicar of Lyncombe; if you can imagine yourself having a row about a vicar. Mummy wanted to go to tea with him, and John did not.

He said, "Why should I? I know all the parsons I

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want to." This was common sense, but it was a mistake.

For Mummy said, "John, you *are* unkind. It's all that horrid choir school. I *shall* be glad to get you away from it." John stood petrified. "You are going to Dunrobin in the autumn anyway, I've quite decided *that*."

Then he did a thing he had never done before. He called Mummy "Mother." He cried out, "Oh no, Mother! No!"

He did not notice he was doing it till he had done it.

She went on, "You will be quite old enough by then for a Public School. I wish heartily I had never sent you to this horrid ritualistic place—they think themselves superior to anyone else and you meet a horrid—"

"Mother! You don't! Oh, *please* let me stay longer. Till Christmas. Till my voice breaks. Mother—"

He hardly knew what he was saying.

"Mother, *please*."

"What has come over you, John? I can't understand it. I shall begin to think you have got into the power of some bad boy."

That was too much. Mothers have no right to say that.

John lost his head and said things. He went on saying them because he could not stop. It is a strange and horrible feeling. If he had stopped suddenly he would have broken down.

But Mummy stopped him by beginning to cry herself.

"John! You wouldn't be so cruel; if you knew how miserable I am." And she went away and left him.

Then that was the end. It is women. Women cry. They get an advantage. John saw that.

And Mummy was very miserable. But he could not see why she should be so miserable.

§

Fortunately it was fine after this, and he went out with Northcott Hales.

Northcott was about as old as the Cherub. He was tallish and thinnish, not burly and brown like Ralph; he had very smooth hair brushed straight back. He was at Malvern. Sword One had gone to Malvern, but Northcott did not seem to know much about him.

He and John were not interesting to each other.

They went down on the beach and mooned about. Mummy thought they would go for bicycle rides and see the country; she talked about it a good deal. But nobody wanted to. You very often do not want to do things that grown-up people suggest. And Northcott preferred the beach and the Beach Walk, because there was a girl called Dodo staying at the Bridge Hotel. She was a rotten sort of girl with clackety heels. But Northcott did not think so, and he was always outside the Bridge Hotel. It was slow.

It was so slow that John did not stand it long. He knew that Northcott only wanted him there at all because it is easier to be talking to someone when the girl comes along.

Once or twice girls smiled at John, and he did not know what to do.

When Northcott arrived at the point of walking by the Lyn with Dodo—her name was Farrer, Dodo Farrer—he did not want John. But John had deserted him some time before that.

He went for walks alone. He did not tell Mummy

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this, and she still thought that Northcott and he were friendly. She used to say that Northcott seemed a nice boy, and John could not explain that he was quite different when she saw him. Many people are like this. Also he could not tell her that Northcott went for walks with Dodo Farrer.

That thought made him angry. He did not like to know that Northcott went for walks by the side of the Lyn with Dodo Farrer.

If P. D. had been there they would have worn sweaters and shorts and made a stone dam. He knew the place. It was farther up the Lyn.

But you cannot do these things by yourself.

XIII

IT was jolly to be back at the choir school and hear the news.

There was a particular piece of news. He only heard it in sections, because it is not customary to ask a newish singing boy whether he has heard the latest.

He gathered it mostly from Eden. Eden controlled the conversation. It was addressed to the crowd and was as follows:—

“Yes, Bony’s passing good in larky things—funniosities where you soar to C in alt and sit down and have a look round, or run up a few faultless *arpeggios*—that style. But when it comes to——” Then followed the dissection of Bony, succeeded by that of Hornby, Marrion, Ernest Barker and P. D.

John asked, “Yes, what about P. D.?” He had gathered the drift of it by this time.

“Ah! P. D. A very proper question, my young friend.” Eden looked profound, and Ernest Barker added, “Dysart could sing jolly well if he wasn’t nervous.” Ernest Barker was always helpful.

“P. D.’s no practical use. Won’t sing outside the choir school portals. Nobody’s any use except Mingy, who is too blamed musical for words. Mingy will sing all solos from henceforth even for evermore.”

Paul said, “Cheers and some laughter.”

“Funny ass.”

It certainly seemed unlikely enough. He asked Paul as they walked away. “I say, what’ll the Cherub *do*?”

"Sing alto," Paul said, "and have a jolly hot time. Alto leads—they're the stuff. But what'll become of Us and Co.'s another matter."

It was strange that a fortnight should have made such a difference to the Cherub. Immovable he had seemed as the high hills. At Easter he had sung high A and it was not Whitsun yet, and he would never sing A again.

He could not even sing E. He shirked it, anyway.

John wished people were not all like that. He wanted a certain type kept to sing high A for ever. He did not like change; neither did Heap. Heap had not expected the Cherub's voice to go suddenly, because trained voices don't as a rule, and he was very much put out about it. He muled and puked.

But it showed how things *do* change. You cannot stay for ever anywhere.

§

The important result of the Cherub's loss was that John did sing a solo.

He sang a solo. Ilay would have had a fit.

Other people sang for several Sundays when soloists were wanted—Bony or Scottie or Purefoy One, who was very nearly inaudible but not quite. And then one day Mr Heap met John on the stairs, and said, "Look here, Menzies, what about a little solo work?"

It seemed to have suddenly occurred to him. John was so overwhelmed that he only said, "Sir?"

Heap proceeded to point out facts on the stairs. He said that John's voice was correct and his intonation was good—old Heap became quite complimentary here—and, in short, that he might do quite well if his voice

carried and he wasn't nervous and on several other conditions.

John was calm. He said, "Sir, I'll sing a solo if you can find a solo I can sing, sir." When he had said this it sounded like Peter Piper picking a peck of pepper.

So they went into Heap's room to find a solo John could sing. Heap had one in his head, of course.

"We mustn't fly too high to begin with. Give you a grasp of things. What do you think of this?" he produced an anthem that he had been holding behind his back in readiness.

John looked at it. It was out of *The Redemption*. In his early days he had heard the Cherub sing it in a most aspiring way; it seemed cheek to try, somehow.

He said, "Sir, but Gabriel sings it, I mean sang it."

"Gabriel won't sing it again," Mr Heap said. "And your reasoning is defective; Gabriel hasn't a monopoly of anthems. I almost think it will do. Scope without undue exertion. A good treble part—you needn't take that high C—and a useful lift by the choir."

So it was settled. Heap had settled it; he had settled it probably before he spoke to John. This often happens.

John went to Paul to tell him the news.

"Mingy! How superb! What's the giddy effort?"

"I don't think it's superb at all," John admitted, "but there you are."

"What's the wild effort?"

"That shout in F from *The Redemption*. 'Wings of lowly faith.' You know the one."

"Pretty sloppy."

"Fearful mush. I suppose it's because it's Evensong."

"Oh, well, it's easy to mush. Golden evenings and

radiant morns and all that slush. Will you be in a hat?"

"I don't seem to mind," John said truthfully. "I know I shall make an egg of myself, but *s'inférieure*."

"Oh, *s'inférieure!*" Paul said. This was the choir school version of *cela ne fait rien*; it does sound like that sometimes.

John liked the anthem less as he practised it. You had to do quite a number of things to get the right degree of slosh in. If you did get it, the congregation would probably all be staring at you in a mist of tears. He saw this. It seemed strange that Heap should want you to do it, when you thought of Bach and Mozart and Palestrina; but James Heap did, and there you were. James got it like that sometimes. P. D. said this. James did not know he said it, of course.

John got on beautifully at the second practice. He was quite bucked with himself, and Heap was quite bucked with him. The Cherub was bucked too. The thing really did not sound bad, especially

. . . life eternal
On wings of lowly faith,

where the voice rises with the music. And he wasn't a bit nervous either. He didn't feel at all as he would have felt if it had been P. D. who had to sing, because one doesn't.

He was quite clear in his mind all through the fatal service. P. D. and the Cherub had wished him luck. The unfortunate part was that the intriguing feeling had gone. He was just very bored with *The Redemption* and "lowly faith" and all the rest of it. All through the prayers there was just the chance that he would stop being bored; but the prayers went very fast,

and his turn came, and he knew he could not sing *The Redemption* in Heap's way. At least he could have done it, but he wouldn't. He didn't want to.

It was damnably awkward. It was the wrong mood. You do get the wrong mood sometimes.

Then he realised that whatever he did Heap could not stop him. Thinking this made him late, and he hurried into the solo, which, of course, he ought not to have done.

But it did not matter. Heap went on playing, and he sang it his own way quite calmly. He did not feel nervous at all. It sounded quite nice; he realised this in the first breathing-space when the chorus comes in with—

From thy love as a Father.

When it came to "They who seek things eternal," the accompaniment reminded him of water flowing along very peacefully—of running streams. He liked peaceful water.

In the last part he sang just ordinarily. He left out all the expression Heap had told him to put in.

They who seek things supernal
Shall rise to life eternal
On wings of lowly faith.

There was silence all over the church when he had done. He looked up and met the Cherub's gaze fixed straight on him. He knew what the Cherub meant. It was all wrong. He ought to have done it Heap's way.

And he knew the Cherub was sorry for him because he thought he was nervous.

It made him angry. He wanted to shout across to the Cherub that he hadn't been nervous, and he had meant

to do it like that. But he did not. The Cherub would not have believed him. He kept his eyes on his knees all through the sermon; he did not look at the Cherub again. As they went out, he felt people saying to each other, "There's the boy who was nervous." He wondered what the choir would say.

But the choir did not say anything.

Mr Heap did not say much either. He seemed to imply that he would not be hard on you. The Cherub was extra nice too, and it was beastly.

He did not try to explain, except to P. D. They went out together after flinging on gowns and mortar-boards, and walked up the road to the corner.

John said, "Look here, you know I did it all wrong."

He stopped Paul saying, "No, not—" because he *had*, according to Heap. And he went on, "I meant to do it wrong. Couldn't do with it. Everybody thinks I hashed it because I was in a sweat."

"So they may," Paul said. "But I was jolly glad. Jolly glad was I. It sounded good enough the way you did it."

"I did it on purpose." John wanted to get that into Paul's head.

But it was there. Paul said, "Of course you did. I got there all right." And John nearly stopped in the road because it seemed so queer that Paul should have understood that.

He said, "The Cherub didn't get there."

"Lord! no, Cherub wouldn't. He'd see things Heap's way."

John said, "But *we'd* see."

"Oh, *we'd* see," Paul said. "Old Hus and Co. sees things."

It was a queer evening altogether.

XIV

FOR the first six weeks of the term John and Mummy kept up rather a stiff correspondence.

John didn't tell her much about anything, because all the things would be about the choir school or P. D., and he was not going to talk about the choir school.

But at the end of June Mummy wrote differently. She said, "Dearest, do you think it would be a good thing if I came down for your birthday and saw you? I feel it would be best, and then we could talk things over. Perhaps I was hasty." And John had just time to scribble a card saying that he would love it, before he rushed off to cricket. But it came back to him at intervals, the singular fact that Mummy wanted to talk things over. It would be satisfactory in a way to let her judge for herself and see that she had been mistaken. He hoped there might be a match.

Cricket was rather sport at the choir school. It was much less of a bore than cricket at Acharn had been; he had always fielded at Acharn. They were not at all bad either, and played most of the schools in Arming with their solitary eleven, including the College—not the College First, of course, but generally an Under Fifteen side. Curgenven was coach, and Gilly often played. And twice in June Father Angus came down, and Paul bowled him.

John was avoiding Father Angus. He knew he wanted him to come to Confession, and there was noth-

ing to say about it, except that he wouldn't. Nobody should make him. And when Father Angus talked he made it sound so horribly logical and as if you ought to.

Mummy came on the first Friday in July to stay at a most select hotel in a square off the front. John met her, and dined with her at the select hotel. It was a good dinner. He arranged to meet her and pilot her to the cricket ground on the next afternoon. He was glad there happened to be a match against St Crispin's, the Roman Catholic school.

It was his birthday too. He would be thirteen. He felt enormous. He *was* enormous. Mummy said so.

The match had begun when they arrived. It was a fine day, and all the colours showed up brilliantly—St George's black and yellow blazers, St Crispin's pink ones, the white flannels, all clean, of course. They stopped by the pavilion, while John sorted out who everyone was. Squish Hornby was bowling, and Marion wicket-keeping. The Cherub was scoring, because he was over fifteen. John told Mummy the names of the sides, and as he was telling them it was the over, and Paul's turn to bowl.

P. D. was in great form that afternoon. He had clean flannels, and his hair was bright in the sun. It had little curly ends. John saw Mummy's eyes follow him as he ran down the pitch and swerved to catch the ball and walk up again. St George's looked quite creditable altogether that afternoon; but no one was as decent as Paul running full tilt down the pitch. Naturally not.

"That's Paul Dysart bowling," John said.

"Where? Oh," said Mummy.

John was disappointed. He had wanted Mummy to like Paul; because, of course, she had not seen him be-

fore. And Paul looked likeable too. But she didn't seem to find him interesting.

She didn't seem to find the match interesting. In fact, she wanted to go away quite soon and have tea somewhere without talking to any of them at all.

This was a terrific swiz, on one's birthday. He had hoped she might ask Paul out to tea. So had Paul. But she didn't.

"Will you be able to come out to tea with me to-morrow, John?" she asked later.

"Oh, rather," said John. "Alone? Or shall I bring a chap with me?"

Mummy didn't seem able to make up her mind. She opened her mouth twice and didn't say anything. Then she said, "Oh, bring a boy if you want to."

John said, "Rather! Etons, I suppose. Or flannels? I suppose flannels wouldn't do for Sunday."

Mummy did not seem to hear at first. "Oh—Etons, I think," she said presently. John was annoyed. He had given a plain hint that he didn't want to wear Etons—the obvious rejoinder for Mummy to make was, "Oh, what does it matter? Come in whatever you like, darling." Mummy wasn't playing the game. She was being rather tiresome.

He broke the news to Paul. Paul said the obvious thing, "Ah but how nice, but shan't we be slightly hot?"

"Yes, we shall, slightly," John admitted. "But Mummy said so, so we'd better."

So they did. They did not really wear Etons, but the blacks that were called Etons to save time. Boys of thirteen and fourteen (P. D. was nearly fourteen) cannot wear Etons with any grace, especially when they are big. Paul was a shade taller than John, but John was broader.

They wore mortar-boards, and looked very select—almost as select as the hotel.

§

But it was not a satisfactory afternoon.

Why, John had not the ghost of an idea. It just wasn't. It was disappointing, because he did want Mummy to like P. D., and she didn't. At least, as far as he could make out, she didn't—though why you should take a dislike to a person you don't know is difficult to see.

She was queer, anyway. She would talk for a minute or two, and then say nothing for quite a long time. And when she did talk, she talked to John; she hardly spoke to Paul. It made John uncomfortable, for he did not want Paul to see that Mummy disliked him.

It was rotten for Paul.

After tea they walked on the front, and John was in the middle. He tried to talk to both the others at once, but this is very difficult when you are walking, and one of the others won't. . . . At last Paul said he had to go, and John was actually glad. It was the first time he had ever been glad to get rid of Paul; and he could not help feeling that Paul was glad too. Anybody would be.

They shook hands, and Paul raised his mortar-board and was off. And then Mummy hardly said another word. She did not speak of Paul again.

It was the most beastly tea John had ever had.

§

But the next day she was as John had always known her.

They went for a long walk in the afternoon, over the Downs; but she did not say anything of pressing personal interest until after tea when they were sitting in the hotel lounge.

After a silence—there were a lot of silences with Mummy—she said suddenly, “John, I think I was too hasty about what I said in the holidays, you know. You can stay here till your voice breaks, dearest, if you really want to. All I want is for you to be happy.”

“Can I really?” John said, full of joy. “And what about afterwards, Mum? I shall have to decide, for my voice won’t last a fearful time. The Cherub’s went quite suddenly, and of course he was far more highly trained than I am.”

“We shall have to talk that over. Is there anything particular you would like to do, darling?”

“I know what I’d *like*,” John said. And he did. He meant to do it too.

“What’s that, dearest boy?”

“To stay on here till my voice breaks, and go to the College like the Cherub does. And I want to learn music.” He said this firmly, for one must be firm.

“My dear John, you *have* taken up this idea. I never imagined you were musical at all till you got into this choir.”

“Anyway I should like to try,” John said, still firmly, “if you’ll pay the fees. I won’t begin and chuck it up—I promise I won’t. I’ll work hard. Heap’ll teach me. And Mummy”—he was rather uncertain of his ground here—“I wanted to ask you if you thought I could see Ilay sometimes.”

Mummy looked dubious. She did not answer at once. When she did, she said, “John, it’s all so much more difficult than you think.”

"I know it is," John said, meaning to be sympathetic.

"Dad—your—Ilay's father said things that I can never, *never* forget, nor forgive. It isn't possible."

"Poor old Mum," John said, and felt awkward.

"So you see—— But I'll do what I can, darling. You shall see Ilay if I can arrange it. And we'll see about the music and the College. I *do* want you to be happy."

And she kissed him, and he let her.

§

On the last Sunday in July P. D. wanted to go for a walk and came round to Loriston like a tornado.

John didn't. He was reading *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which is a book you cannot leave. But P. D. wanted to see the funnies on the front, and he would not leave either.

John said, "Henry Baskerville's just going to dinner with Stapleton."

And Paul replied, "Well, he needn't have his dinner till tea-time. Besides, there was a fog. You've read it before, you know you have." And this was true, so John came.

They walked right down the Parade and back again. People looked at their mortar-boards (you had to wear mortar-boards always when out alone; it was a rule), and girls giggled at them. They did not smile back, of course. They were very dignified. . . .

Coming back up the Parade Paul said suddenly, "I say, someone's calling you."

"Me? Who'd call me?"

"Well, someone is. Highly funny. I heard them say, 'There's John Menzies.' "

John looked all round, beginning in the wrongest direction, as one always does. He saw nothing at all familiar, and it was Paul who came to the rescue again. He said. "There on the seat—you owl—waving."

Then John saw to his great surprise that a lady with a boy and girl, one on each side of her, were doing their best to attract his attention with walking-sticks. He could not imagine whom he knew with a boy and a girl.

Then he saw. It was Mrs Taggart with Paddy and Peggy.

He and Paul hastily made their way to the seat. P. D. murmured, "O hats! Who is it, O John?" a question there was hardly time to answer. You cannot explain in a few well-chosen words either.

"We daren't get up and leave the seat," called Mrs Taggart.

"They get bagged," called Paddy in the voice John had known so well.

"And what are you doing in a college cap, John Menzies? Is this your brother? We saw you pass looking as studious as could be, and we couldn't decide whether it was you or not. Peggy said it was, and Paddy said it wasn't."

"I said it was."

"Nonsense, Paddy, you swore it wasn't. So we waited till we saw you coming back, and then we all looked hard and waved. It would have been awful if you had been a total stranger and froze us with a look."

They all laughed. They seemed to know each other at once.

"And which brother is this? Not the eldest, surely?"

P. D. looked scandalised.

"He's not my brother," John explained hastily.

"Not your——"

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"He isn't my brother. I've only got one brother. He's at the same school as me. Dysart."

Mrs Taggart shook hands with Paul. John thought she was still surprised though she did not show it; and he was surprised too. He talked to Paddy.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"Long leave from Eton. We're going to Brighton to-morrow." Paddy's hair was beautifully brushed. He used Anzora Cream; he was dapper. John was glad to be able to show P. D. that there really was a chap called O'Farrell, because talked-of friends do not appear as a rule. Otherwise, as they said, nix.

Peggy was not much changed, except that she had done something different to her hair. Girls do. John had always rather liked Peggy. She didn't fuss, anyway.

It was obvious that they were all going to tea at the Hotel Majestic.

Mrs Taggart walked first with John and Paddy, and Peggy behind with Paul. She did not seem able to get over P. D.; she said to John, "What did you say his name was?"

John told her.

"And he comes from?"

John said, "Shropshire."

She said, "Shropshire."

He wondered if she knew Shropshire. But she did not say.

They had a very fine tea. There were mixed cakes, and more mixed cakes, and they finished up with crumpets, because they had forgotten to have them before. And Mrs Taggart made everybody talk.

P. D. thought it was all first-class. He said this to

John afterwards. And John did too, except that he could not understand about Mrs Taggart.

And he had thought of something too; something he could not tell P. D. It was because she thought he and Paul were brothers—for she really had thought it—it wouldn't have been the same with the Cherub or Bony or anybody. And they were not brothers, or even relations.

But he knew why she had thought it. It was Paul being like Uncle Mush that had made her think it.

P. D. was like Uncle Mush in the photograph.

He suddenly realised it; he was an utter fool not to have seen it before.

XV

JOHN arrived at Lyncombe for the summer holidays in gales and slanting rain. He was nearly blown off the platform altogether when he landed; it was the work of a moment to button his burberry to the neck, engage an outside porter and tear full tilt down the streaming hill. It was so wet that Mummy and the new Cairn terrier hadn't come to meet him. But he liked the rain, rather.

Mummy met him at the door, and kissed him.

"Why, John darling, how wet you are. Your face tastes salt. Why didn't you take the bus?"

"Take the bus!"

He rushed upstairs to change and have a bath. He hoped the rain would go on and on; then he would be out in it all day.

The bath was so hot that it stung. Baths do when you are wet. He sang his French songs in the bath, in accordance with the custom of the Cherub, Christopher and himself. You always sang French when you were washing, even if your French accent was what John knew his was. His own favourite was the *Chanson de Florian*, but Christopher liked "Habanera" from *Carmen*. Christopher looked at his tongue in the bathroom glass every morning, and the Cherub swore he took his temperature.

O, c'est bien lui, rendez-le moi.
J'ai son amour, il a ma foi.

This put him in a good humour; but Mummy was tiresome at supper.

"John dearest, when the weather changes I want you to join the tennis club. Don't frown, darling."

It was enough to make one frown.

"Oh, lord Mum, I can't. I can't play tennis. And I don't know the people."

"But you never will know them, dearest one, if you don't make an effort. There are some very nice people here too—there's a Mrs Bushell who lives on the Valley road—she called on me the other day—she's got two daughters who belong to the club, and I'm sure they'll introduce you and make you feel at home."

"I hate girls."

"John, that's so silly when you don't know any. You certainly are very young in some ways."

John ate in silence.

"And you *mustn't* be, darling. You're too big to be a baby."

John knew how it would be now. He and Mum would begin to quarrel before he had been home an hour. It was safer to say nothing.

"How's Paul?" Mummy asked, breaking the silence.

"He's all right." And he said to himself, "Why ask? You don't want to know."

As soon as he could, John escaped, and went out in the rainy twilight with Duffus the Cairn terrier.

§

It rained for the first week, and John did as he had planned—buttoned up his coat and ploughed up to the moor with a stick and Duffus. Duffus did not like rain, for the mud stuck to his hair and made him

draggled, but he clearly felt it was his business to do whatever John did. He would sit by him very sagely when he lay sprawled out reading on the heather, wagging his tail slightly whenever John moved, or kissing his hand if a little attention seemed called for.

The rain on the moor did not matter in the same way as the rain in the valley. It swept across and left you almost dry. John would lie for hours reading in one of the little heathery dips, and he never got wet at all.

He read *Modern Europe* most of the time. They were doing it with Gilly. It was pretty interesting, but twice he fell asleep, and several times he found himself thinking of something else. It is possible to do this. You can read a page of a book and know what it is about, and all the time you can have something else in your head. Once John saw the road from Morden to Mordenstair going over the bridge, and Duncan Seton coming along with eggs. He did not know whether he had ever seen Duncan Seton on the bridge with eggs; but he came into that particular page of *Modern Europe*. And once when he was reading about the Congress of Vienna, he thought of Miles MacGillivray. He never did think about Miles MacGillivray, but now he did, and as he was reading he was remembering a walk over the burn and up the glen. When you think like this, it seems as if there were two "you"s. But that is tosh.

On the eighth day the wind dropped. John was eating gingerbread and lying on his stomach in the dip, and he saw fine weather coming, and hoped it was a mistake. But it was not a mistake.

The day after it came he was introduced to Esme Bushell.

She called with her mother after tea. He had been down on the beach, throwing Duffus into the water and making him swim; he was muddy and untidy and not at all in a fit state to see visitors. In his innocence he burst into the drawing-room, to find them both sitting there talking to Mummy; and then he could not get away.

"This is John—my boy—Mrs Bushell, Miss Bushell. John, this is Esmé, who is going to play tennis with you."

John shook hands, murmuring something. His impression of Esmé was of somebody tall, taller than he was, with a mass of very fair hair. Then he escaped to change his wet things.

"Well, I suppose I'll be led as a lamb to the slaughter," he said later, when he came down and found the Bushells gone.

Mummy laughed. "My poor old son, the tennis club opens next Tuesday, and Esmé Bushell is coming to call for you and take you along to play. Is that so very awful?"

"Utterly puce."

"What a very remarkable expression, John dearest."

"We say it at school."

Mummy left that alone.

"It'll be far too wet for tennis," John proceeded. "The ground'll be in a perfect slop. The whole crowd of them must be dotty."

"The Bushells were telling me about that. It seems to be the doing of the president of the club, because so many of the members can only join in the holidays. They say this is a very drying wind. Now, John"—Mummy began, as mothers do, to improve the occasion—"you will be pleasant to these girls, won't you? I can't

bear to see you growing up all by yourself, not trying to make friends." This was, of course, merely silly. "Be nice to Esmé Bushell. I think she's a jolly girl. You will, won't you?"

"Oh, lord yes, I suppose I'll be polite."

"And I hope you'll have a nice game, darling. It'll do you good." She bent down and kissed his forehead.

"Oh, lord Mum, do leave my wig alone. I've just brushed it."

"John, you *are* disagreeable. And I do wish you wouldn't say 'Oh, lord!'"

"I'll say 'Oh, God!' if you like it better."

But at that awkward moment the supper bell rang.

§

Esmé Bushell called for John at three on Tuesday. She stood at the gate, looking taller than ever in white, with her tennis racket over her shoulder and her Panama hat pulled over her eyes. She tied her hair in a bow close to her head, and it frothed out into a great fair shock under her hat. It was splendid hair, John couldn't help seeing—very fair, and so wiry that each separate hair stood out by itself. Beyond that, which he admired rather, she reminded him of Alice in Wonderland grown tall.

She did not wait for him to open the conversation, but started herself in the friendliest manner as soon as they began to walk up the hill.

"It *is* funny the club opening at once after the rain, you know. I never knew it happen before. Mrs Harold Slack—she's the president, you know—she's been playing tennis in the Riviera, and now she's come

straight back and opened the club. Mother says it isn't as if this was Riviera weather."

"When does it usually open?" He had to say something; she expected him to.

"Oh—now, generally—but look at the weather! Even the wind won't have dried it all up properly. Mother says——"

She talked on cheerfully, panting a little as they climbed the hill. John put in a word or two at intervals. "I say!" or "How funny!" or "I should think so!" (or "not!" as the case might be). Presently they arrived at the club.

"I don't suppose there'll be many here to-day," Esmé said. "Would you like to go to the pavilion? And then we might get up a set."

John went meekly. He did not want to in the least, for he had his shoes on; but it seemed to be the correct thing. One boy was there already, tying his shoe-laces; he was smaller than John, though probably older, and he stared in silence until John went and washed his hands simply to get out of his way. Then he went out to find Esmé.

She was talking to a hard, bony, short person in very clean whites. John wondered if he could have downed this person in a fair fight; she looked as hard as nails.

"This is Mrs Slack," Esmé said. "Mrs Slack, this is the new member."

She did not know how to introduce John, so she left him out. You could not call him Mr. Menzies.

Mrs Slack shook hands with a claw, and John thought to himself, "How did you get Mr Slack to marry you, I wonder."

"You keen?" she said briefly.

"I'm pretty bad."

"I expect you're jolly good, really," Esmé said.

"I certainly am not." He felt fatuous, but he had to go on saying it.

"Here's Osmond," Mrs Slack said suddenly. "I'll make up with you three until the men come."

"Oh, that'll be ripping," Esmé bayed. "She's fearfully good," she remarked aside to John as he went with her to tighten the net.

John said, "Then she'd better play with me."

"Oh, I don't know—you'd be miles too strong, I expect. Osmond's fairly good, but I'm beastly uncertain."

John noticed that the staring boy had joined Mrs Slack. He asked, "Who *is* Osmond?"

"Oh—only Osmond Coldham." This did not explain anything, and John studied Osmond himself. He was dark and smooth (every chap but John was smooth) and very well turned out; he wore the tie of some Public School house, John didn't know what. And he looked as if he thought no one could be quite right or sane who did not go to that school. Probably he did think so.

The set was rather distressing. John played with Mrs Slack, who was indeed fearfully good. They won the set, chiefly because she took most of the balls, shooting them hard and low into untenanted quarters; she smote with tight lips and wild eyes, while he stood politely out of the way and tried not to balk her. Once she served a double fault, and made John very uneasy by continuing to blame herself. "So *stupid*. I lost the game by that." What she must think of him, he dared not contemplate.

"You haven't played much," she said abruptly at the end.

"I've hardly played at all."

She looked at him piercingly with her small eyes.
“Well, thank you.”

He went back to the pavilion to put his blazer on, and was joined by Osmond, who stared at it in silence. He seemed to say, “Where are *you*, I wonder,” and for a minute John wished he could have said Rugby or Marlborough, or somewhere. But of course Osmond hadn’t asked him.

John played again, with Esmé and a small lady with powder on her face. The fourth was a little man with a long moustache, who stood on his toes to serve. As soon as he could, John escaped, but not before Esmé had buttonholed him for Thursday afternoon. He was sick of all these new people, and would have given anything to be John Mingy again. Supposing as he crossed the club field to the gate that he had heard that piercing whistle of P. D.’s urging him to get a buck on—Paul’s whistle really was peculiarly piercing, owing to the gap in his teeth. And supposing he had been at the gate, calling out as John got near, “Hullo, Johnny! Finished with the funnies? How superb!” . . . But Paul was in Shropshire, and the world had changed suddenly to a mob of strangers called Slack and Bushell, and a scathing little Etonian who said with his glance, “Who are *you*? ”

§

John’s circle of acquaintances enlarged. Besides Mrs Slack and Mrs Aumonier (the lady with the mauve nose), he met Miss Salmon and Miss Sweeting and Miss Grace Husband, and various other people. The male members did not trouble to speak to him as a rule, with the exception of Mr Page, who was quite harmless, and Bobby Conquest, a chap of sixteen with spots on his

chin.' The only people John liked were Esmé Bushell and Joy. Joy was the other Bushell. Esmé was rather a stupid girl, but she was jolly and very good-natured; and Joy was quite pretty, with little twinkling blue eyes and dimples. She was sensible too—not like Grace Husband.

Grace Husband began by being a nuisance. Miss Salmon and Miss Sweeting were quite old, though they screamed when they played; but Grace Husband was not much older than Esmé, which is the age when girls start being silly. Grace was an ass. She said to him once,

"I'll let you carry my racket back to the pavilion."

Then she ran away and began to talk to Bobby Conquest. John was annoyed. He wanted to call out "Here, take your beastly racket," only of course that was impossible; he had to carry the thing, but he slammed it down on the pavilion table.

Tea was the worst time. Mrs Slack boiled the kettle on a gas ring, while the company sat about the pavilion and were waited on by the younger male members. This meant that John was walking about most of the time with a plate in each hand, or taking up somebody's cup for more tea. They drank oceans of tea. And when he put his own cup down, somebody else always seemed to seize it and walk off with it. He could have stood all this, though, if it had not been for Grace Husband. She was the lair. She would wait for him to come and ask for her cup; sometimes he avoided her, but Mrs Slack was sure to ask him to bring it. And whenever he was in this way thrown into contact with her she would raise her eyes to his face—she had eyes like a cow—and look at him, and then half smile and look away. It made John blush without meaning to, and

you feel a fool when you blush. Also it was difficult not to smile nervously, though he felt like anything but grinning. He understood that she preferred him to Bobby because he didn't have spots.

But she did not know his age. When she knew that he was thirteen she threw him over suddenly. It was a great relief. She told Esmé that that was the stupidest little boy she had ever met.

Esmé told John this.

He was glad to find that Esmé and Joy were different. They went to a fairly decent school and played hockey; only Esmé talked too much slang—girls' slang. Boys do not care for girls' slang. Also they both disliked Grace, which was a distinct point in their favour.

One day they went out for a walk, up the Lyn to Lyn Vale, where there are huts and you have tea. Mummy was pleased at this. It was quite a decent afternoon, and they criticised all the members of the club; Joy could imitate Mrs Slack, and did. They threw stones down the stream, and John found that Joy could really throw, not hurl wildly underarm. And they talked of hockey matches and Rugby; Joy actually knew the rules. In these ways the time passed very pleasantly, until they came to the bridge by the Vale Combe, where the path widens and the river narrows. And here they met some other people for the first time. They were going in the opposite direction—a lady and two girls. One was small and puggy, and one was tall. And the tall one stared—how she stared! She was an impudent girl, and he did not approve of her. He noticed that Esmé and Joy made slight signals of recognition.

"Who on earth are those?" he asked when they were past.

Joy sniffed, and Esme said, "The Tallentyres."

John was surprised to find himself asking, "Do they belong to the club?"

"They hardly ever come. They're hardly ever here."

By this he knew that they did belong to the club. He found from other remarks that Uggie Tallentyre wasn't bad. Uggie was the puggy one; she had to be. So he knew that Esme and Joy did not approve of the Miss Tallentyre who had stared at him. He knew it because Joy had sniffed.

He went several times to the tennis club after that, but he did not see the Tallentyres.

XVI

HE rushed back to St George's to begin learning music.

Heap had a special way. It was peculiar. He did not teach you to play a piece, but he taught you to play. You had finger exercises and wrist exercises, and scales, and for a change scales in chords, so that you knew the chords which went with each note of the scale. This was rather interesting. When you had got the chords of your scale into your head, you went on to other things, Sevenths and Ninths, and strange things that Resolve. They do not Resolve to do anything, they merely Resolve. The Diminished Seventh, which is really a bit of a ninth, will resolve into all keys. It took John some time to see this, and Heap called him a poop; but when he did see it he saw a good many other things he had not seen before.

He was just in the midst of examining the Diminished Seventh—playing it on the piano and sitting and glowering at it—when he got a cold in his head. It was a particularly obnoxious one, the kind in which you blow and blow till your nose is so sore that you almost pray you may not sneeze again just then. All the household caught the cold, except the Cherub, and he was in as depressed a frame of mind as if he had. John did not see much of him, though, for a day or two.

Mrs Grant was motherly at this trying time.

“Why, John, what a silly boy you are. Quite a silly baby boy.” This was when she met him coming

in from posting a letter. "There you are with that cold in your head, running about outside in the damp. Dear me! dear me! we shall have to keep you chained to a leg of the dining-room table, really we shall."

John said, "I'm all right," and unfortunately sneezed four times. She was death on sneezing.

"Come in and have something nice. Such a nice lump of sugar and eucalyptus! I can't think why you won't."

He did try not to look as if he thought Mrs Grant a fool. One does not behave thus to a hostess. And he was indeed worse next day; so much worse that she suddenly became very firm.

"Yes, but I insist that John stays in. I haven't any authority over you, Ralph—you *will* rush off and do what you like, though I'm sure you've got a cold coming out. You won't let me take your temperature?"

So John stayed in. It was not worth while to make a fuss, for his head felt muzzy and his voice was gone. He stayed in, and glared at the Diminished Seventh.

Josephus also stayed in, making hoarse bronchial noises.

§

He picked out Modal scales as well. Heap had said he could. Modal scales have rather a painful sound until you get the right chord. But John got it quite right at last, while he had his cold, and played it to Paul when he went back to school.

He told P. D. the names of the scales.

"That's the Lydian. That's Mixolydian, like folk-songs. That's the *Aeolian*—rather a nice one, the *Aeolian*. It begins on A, otherwise you have to put sharps in. I'll play it anywhere you like."

Paul was standing with his elbows on the top of the piano. When John had finished the *Æolian* on A with all harmonies correct, he happened to look at him, because it struck him that Paul wasn't saying as much as usual about the *Æolian* or anything else. And Paul always talked. You do not generally look at people's eyes, but John did look at Paul's then. He knew what they were like—light hazel, as clear as water—he liked P. D.'s eyes. But there was something about them this afternoon that John didn't know.

"You coldified too?"

"Nix doing," Paul said. "Hail, here's R. G."

The Cherub said, "What a hell of a din you infants are making." He had to talk like that because he was sixteen, besides being a sound and efficient alto.

The Cherub was at the College now, but he came in frequently to see how the choir school was getting on.

He bagged the piano, and John went to Loriston. Nothing further happened, and P. D. was quite ordinary. He did not tell John anything about it, which was so unusual that John thought it must have some reference to Father Angus and Confession and what the book calls darling sins. It was the only thing John could think of; because P. D. had looked hurt and puzzled somehow. The Aberdeen at Mordenstair used to look the same when you kicked him suddenly.

And of course you do not talk of darling sins.

Diminished Sevenths were now being more interesting and were working themselves into tunes. It was surprising to think that you could not play pieces by other people and yet you could play tunes by yourself. There was one group of chords that reminded him of Acharn, and the corridor leading to the library, and boys drink-

ing milk at the lunch-table in the window. And it was because the chords went to words.

Where is the land of Luthoray
And where the region Elenore?
I do faint therefor.

That was because he had seen it in the library. But other things came then, not only Acharn. He saw places—roses and country lanes; and a wood full of primroses where they stopped and listened to the cuckoo. But who “they” were he could not tell.

It was something he remembered, only it had never happened.

One does remember things. . . . But he had never been there. He only thought of it when he played, “Where the region Elenore?”

Perhaps it *was* the region Elenore.

§

The following Monday John took some money and a clean pocket-handkerchief and issued forth to buy Francis Thompson. He went to Slater's, in College Street, where you always go.

“The *Selected Poems* is the only one of Francis Thompson which we have in stock, sir. We should be pleased to order——”

“Has it got ‘The Mistress of Vision’ in it?” A man who was reading the backs of the Everyman Edition turned round, and John felt his ears getting hot.

“I couldn't say, sir, not without looking.”

“I'll look.” The paper was stiff and rough-edged and very pleasant to touch.

"Have you the *Poems of Passion?*" a girl asked at the counter. John listened, of course.

"There are a lot of hers brought out in the shilling edition—*Passion and Pleasure* and *Power*, and quite a few more."

John found one in italics.

For there Anteros and Eros
There with man conjoined was.
Twinstone of the Law, Ischyros
Agios Athanatos.

This was so queer and decent and unlikely that he decided to have Francis Thompson at once. "Agios Athanatos" was like something built with great grey stones. Then he drifted over to look for the *Poems of Passion*; but he forgot all about them in twenty seconds because of the *Shropshire Lad*. P. D. was a Shropshire lad. So he had them both.

They were the first decent books he had ever bought.

It was hard to sit down and do prep. instead of reading "*The Mistress of Vision*" and the *Shropshire Lad*. But it was not much good trying to combine the two, for Jonah generally grew restless and came round in a very searching way.

It was just bad luck that he did not come on that particular evening. John might have read them, as it happened, the whole of prep. Jonah was a bit "off" that night.

But John was jumpy. It would have been no good trying to read. He couldn't get rid of the feeling that Father Angus was coming in.

It was quite unjustified, for Father Angus did not come near them. John didn't even know for certain

that he was in Arming at all. It was just a premonition.

8

November was chilly and gloomy and grey. It was like "Agios Athanatos" on the piano. For days it rained very thickly and straightly, and you said, "How utterly revolting!" when anybody talked about it, and yet you liked it, somehow. The choir splashed to St George's down a shiny wet street with water in pools; and P. D. and John came last when they could, and walked through all the pools. The church was so dark that it had to be lit for nine Mass. John liked All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in the rain. He and Paul used to dash out of the gate so rapidly that they cannoned the passers-by.

On All Souls' Day you have lighted candles. And you have—

Requiem eternam dona eis,
Domine et lux perpetua.

John used to think of "lux perpetua" in early Mass, and imagine shining seraphs and things dazzling bright like swords. They made the "lux." It kept him from thinking how much he wanted his breakfast, for insides are a great drawback in early Communion. . . .

In pictures of seraphs, they are nothing but little fat round heads and wings; or else babies kicking in the sky. And the Cherub being called that made things more complicated, because of course you couldn't sing *Cherubim with sleepless eye* without thinking of Ralph. . . .

Presently Advent came along, and they began practising Christmas carols, which were for the most part extremely decent. The words were generally ancient.

This did Herod sore affray and
 Grievously bewilder.
 So he gave the word to slay and
 Slew the little childer.

This goes to a jolly tune, and he and the Cherub
 sang it over as they were going home at night.

“So he gave the word to slay
 And slew the little chi-lder,
 And slew the little childer.”

The Cherub went on to the next verse.

“O and A and A and O
 Cum cantibus in choro.”

But John stopped, because he had suddenly thought
 of his Guild card. It was the Christmas decorations
 that had made him think of it—walking into the vestry
 after Father Angus.

He hadn't had his Advent Guild card.

“Benedicamus Domino.
 Benedicamus Domino.”

“I say, have the Guild books been given out for Ad-
 vent yet? Haven't had mine.”

The Cherub had begun to hum.

“In dulci jubilo.”

“He my love my wonder—Gilly'll give you your
 card if you ask for it. He's probably forgotten.”

“But doth not Father Angus come round in state?”

“Alpha es et O.
 Alpha es et O.”

"Doesn't he, Cherub?"

The Cherub quite obviously was singing because he did not want to talk.

"Isn't he coming round in state? I forgot all about him, but I can't remember now that I've seen him for a young age."

"No." The Cherub suddenly warmed up to it. "And you can make up your mind not to see him for another damned young age."

"Why—ye godfathers—why ever not?"

The Cherub whistled between his teeth. He seemed to want to be doing something.

"He's left St George's."

"But why?" John meant to go on asking till he knew. "Oh, don't be such a fool!" the Cherub exploded. He said a word in front of "fool" too. "I don't want to tell you all about it."

"There's been a row, has there? When?"

"Beginning of this term—not long ago."

"Why didn't I know, I wonder. Did the other chaps know? Did P. D. know?"

"You were sniffing or something. My good fool, we didn't tell you. One doesn't howl these things out for fun."

"No." John felt very old and wise, like somebody in a book. He guessed the origin of the row—a girl. It was always girls. Father Angus had behaved badly to a girl; betraying her, they called it in books.

He had read a book where a priest betrays a girl. Then he un-priested himself and married her. John wondered if Father Angus would do that.

He had not realised that these things happened to real people. It was a book thing. But Father Angus

had gone. He had *gone*. He would never wear a cassock again or ask John to come to Confession.

He said "Good God!" It seemed appropriate.

§

That night he woke up suddenly, and thought, "What queer thing did I hear?" And then he remembered. It was not true at first, but it gradually became truer. Things are often like this when you first wake up. Presently it was quite true.

He went to sleep presently. And when he woke up in the morning again it was not true. He lay and thought till it became possible.

It was queer that he had never absolutely liked Father Angus, even long ago when he had talked in the vestry. He didn't like the things he said. And then he bothered about Confession. He seemed to be very bothered about Confession. This was because he was a priest. Priests renounced the world.

All the same, he had done it. He had done it and not minded what people would say. And the Cherub was very wroth.

John did not quite see why the Cherub should be so particularly wroth.

XVII

MUMMY came down for Christmas to the little hotel in the square off the front.

The first flaw appeared on Christmas Day. He had to go to the eight o'clock Celebration with Mummy instead of the seven o'clock with Paul. She wanted him to, and he had to; and not even to St George's, but St Peter's, which was nearer the hotel. It made things go wrong. He and Paul had fixed it all up, about meeting at the corner of College Road; and then he wanted to go with Paul, and he didn't want to go with Mummy. But these things happen.

He was sorry for himself. He had to stand in the aisle behind a boy who used the solid brilliantine that smells of cherry pie—and the church was light and bare and hideous, not dark and beautifully mysterious like St George's—and neither Paul nor the Cherub was there at all—and the clergy were old and slow and frowsty. He tried to say "Ave verum corpus" in the chancel, and then somebody knelt down suddenly in front of him in the silly way people do, and the person behind trod on his heel. It was an irritating affair altogether.

He did not say his prayers afterwards either. There were set prayers in the Guild books, which the boys were supposed to say—devotions and collects from the Sacramentary or somebody or other—but John had left his manual behind and was too lazy to try to remember

how they went. He decided that praying was a nuisance anyhow. You asked to be strengthened for service, and nothing happened. The people were moving slowly and the old Johnny had miscalculated and was consecrating again. Foolish old bunkhead. He thought dreamily of the Cherub serving at the altar kneeling upright with his face buried in his hands—the girdle was like the cord of a dressing-gown—he and Eden served at Evensong sometimes, lifting the candles when it came to “A light to lighten the Gentiles”—no one had asked John to serve and lift candles—he wasn’t religious enough. Perhaps they did not like him. You never are asked to do things if you are afraid people do not like you—being afraid of it makes them not like you—people only listened to Ernest Barker when they felt like it.

“Our Father” at last—Pater noster—Father our. The Germans said it like that too. Vater unser, der du bist. Who thou art. Anzora cream. Bony used Anzora, but Paul said he would be damned. Mysticism—that meant leaving your mind a blank for holy thoughts to come—St Teresa was a mystic—“O thou undaunted daughter of desires”—your mind a blank, your mind a blank—what was coming?

Now red wine and mother’s dandy.
The weight, boys, the weight.

It meant nothing. If it meant nothing, why had it come? Mysticism was utterly futile—the parson was sliding back the rail—they would be going soon—quite time too.

It was not a success. His elbows hurt.

§

But High Mass was all right. They had César Franck. He was proud of High Mass, and he liked to think that Mummy was looking on.

They were to dine together at the little hotel. P. D. was not asked, of course; even if Mummy had suggested it, John would have refused. He was slightly bored at having to go out, for the choir school would probably have rather a good time in the evening. However, it had to be done. Mummy was his mother. Mr Brent had jawed a good deal about mothers at the end of each term.

They dined alone at their small table. There was the usual food—turkey and pheasant and plum-pudding with buttons and thimbles and things. There were also crackers, but you cannot pull crackers with your mother.

He discouraged this.

After dinner they sat in the lounge and watched the people passing through. And a queer thing happened. A tall girl walked past to the lift with a swish and a swing; and as she passed she looked at John. And John looked at her. The odd part was he knew her.

He knew her at once. For a minute he could not quite remember where it was, but Joy Bushell came into his mind and then he knew that it was by the river in the summer, and she was Miss Tallentyre.

It was queer that he knew that. She would have been surprised if she knew he knew her name. But perhaps she would not, for she did not look like the sort of person you could surprise.

He thought she knew him too, only he was not quite sure.

And it was queer that you should meet the same person at Arming whom you had met at Lyncombe. But these things do happen.

He did not tell Mummy, for fear she might think he wanted to play tennis with Miss Tallentyre.

§

After Christmas Mummy went away, and things were quiet—decent too.

They were not dull because they were quiet. This is a great mistake. On the contrary, they were very interesting. Some days there would be a street boy accolade; there was always a feud with the street boys. Once there was a free fight, and a street mutt got hurt with a hockey-stick. Gilly was very angry about this, and two chaps got caned. Private alphabets flourished, and a new flag-wagging code was invented; also parodies of hymns (not the more decent ones—only "Christian, seek not" and that sort) and the usual cooking up of Psalms. If you were really a bright lad, you could carry on a long conversation in the Psalms.

You did not do these things in Mass. It was a rule. John liked Mass. He was trying to find out about the Roman Catholics. Christopher would argue sometimes. He said that you might just as well be a Roman Catholic straightforward, and that it was no good unless you were because you went to hell.

It was boring of the Roman Catholics. They said other Catholics were not Catholics at all, and that there was no Mass.

John did not bother about it much, because there

was Mass—only you said it in English. And you had all the best music at High Mass every Sunday. You made it as decent as you could, and if Christ could hear, it seemed likely that he would not bother much about the Roman Catholics himself.

John often went out to put the chancel ready before service. He and Paul bagged it together, and they always did it when they could get out before Ernest Barker. Sometimes there was a scuffle. They wore purple cassocks.

It was a nice term altogether. He and Paul went for walks, to Virieux and Maryfield Bay and other interesting places. Gilly let them. Sussex is an old county; it seems older than the rest, somehow. Once they heard the cuckoo.

He was still playing the piano. He played pieces, because now he could; but he still made up his own harmonies when he liked words. He liked Francis Thompson.

On Ararat there grew a vine
When Asia from her bathing rose.
Our first sailor made a twine.

That went to music. So did

There is a peak on Himalay.

And several of the *Shropshire Lad*, though not as many as one would think. It was most interesting, and he would play with the soft pedal down whenever he knew the Cherub was out.

This was most necessary, because once the Cherub burst in and said, "What *are* you drivelling at?"

John said, "Chords for Heap," and the Cherub replied, "Why, what the blue devil?"

Luckily he forgot about it afterwards. But it made John cautious.

Things jogged along in this pleasant way till nearly Easter, and then John had a shock—an exciting shock.

It was Mummy. Mummy was going away for ten days. So she wrote to say that John could go home and take another boy to keep him company; because she had found an oldish servant called Mrs Kethro to look after the house. John was so excited by the time he reached this part that he nearly shouted.

By Easter it was all settled. P. D. had written to his aunt in Shropshire where *in summer-time on Bredon the bells they sound so clear*, and she had said he could. And Gilly had said he could. It was a great deal too intriguing to be true.

§

It was true. They went down together.

The journey was of a sporting nature; and when they arrived at Lyncombe Paul said, "The excitement was tremendous. I've lost my box."

He had, too. It had been left at Stapledore, or so Paul and the porter thought. "Train was all bunged up at Stapledore. Oh, very bunged it was." It was P. D. who said this, not the porter.

By a brilliant inspiration they sent a telegram.

"Oh, hot lads we are."

Then they tore down the hill, talking about all the things under the sun.

P. D. had not said much about Mummy, but John knew he was glad she was not there. You never quite were sure with her, of course, but the main idea was that she considered Paul a bunkish lad.

John said to him, "It's cos you're a bit like me." He did not say anything about Uncle Mush.

Paul said, "What, doesn't she like *you* then? That's all bunk, my good lad."

And indeed it did seem fairly futile. But of course Paul did not know about Uncle Mush. If he had he would probably have said, "I don't want to be like your mouldy old cast-off ancestors."

John did not tell him. He didn't tell anybody.

They did everything there was to do. They went to Porlock and explored the weir—which is a very intriguing thing to do, if you have been bright enough to wear shorts—they looked for the source of the Exe, and did not find it, but instead scared a number of moor ponies—they climbed the Doone water-slide without the least difficulty (and indeed it is a bunkish water-slide)—they walked round the cliff to Heaven's Mouth and nearly fell over—they spent mornings and afternoons at Clee Bay, drew pictures in the sand, explored caves, and collected large quantities of winkles which all disappointingly turned out poisonous.

They did not eat them: a fisherman told them. They are called horse, or hoarse, winkles and are unfit for human consumption.

John told the boys afterwards that it was a jolly sporting holiday. And it was. It was full of quite small things that you liked thinking of. County Gate and the place where they saw the sea—and the gate where the coach passed them blowing its horn and they got off their bikes to wave—and the bend in the road where they talked to the old man with the carrot cart—and lying on their fronts on the downs talking about all sorts of things—and Dunkery Beacon in the distance, dim glens and meeting trees and bells. And he and

P. D. alone, talking in the words of the Psalmist up in the heather and down in the glens.

P. D. was different from other people. He was a queer lad anyway; he did not show you much, or give things away—remote is the word—so that every time you met him he gave you a new surprise. And John knew he was different because once or twice they had lain on the moor in the evening and never said a word.

§

That was the term when they had crazes.

Everybody kept white mice, in places where they were not observed. John and Paul had two at first, Napoleon and Josephine; afterwards there were six more, which might have meant too many mouths to feed, only Josephine ate them all except their tails. And shortly after Napoleon ate Josephine all except her tail; they carried the tails down to the kitchen in a shovel. After this they let Napoleon loose on the Downs.

John had not seen the family being born or eaten. He was glad of this.

They were then off mice.

The pitch-pipe craze came about then. It was rather futile; you bought pitch-pipes and tuning-forks on all the notes you could find. It is possible to ring a tuning-fork against your teeth, and John often did this in prep., and made the shock go all through his head. Then Ernest Barker started the geological craze, and picked up specimens on the beach, but this was very futile indeed.

You find iron pyrites on the beach. The little boys

used to keep it in their desks. It is not at all interesting.

The cipher craze was much more intriguing than this, because it is all about Hang hog and whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare. And the spook craze was the most interesting of all, only it did not get very far owing to Gilly. Eden could do table-turning—he said so—but there was never a chance to try. They talked about it a great deal though, and chaps would tell ghost stories if they knew them.

John also learnt Bach with Mr Heap. You have to learn Bach.

The time passed so quickly that soon they began to talk about holidays again. But this time it was summer holidays.

Holidays were in the air. Even the Snark unbent so far as to study ordnance maps with the Cherub. They would not say what the scheme was, but it was fairly obvious.

The Cherub said, "Rather a bracy scheme, Snark, too, what?"

But the Snark only replied, "I've loht the road. Ralph, thou jackape, thou hatht led uth into a morath." He was following out some course in red ink, and had no time for bracy schemes or anything else. John found out afterwards that it was the New Forest. Snark intended to walk all over England in time, and had already done Sussex and Bucks.

John would have liked to go with them. But they did not ask him, and Mummy was expecting him. And it was fine; and fine weather meant the tennis club.

He had hoped Esmé might have forgotten about him, but she had not at all. Indeed, she came in several times before he arrived, Mummy said, to inquire when

he would be free to make fixtures. She was a girl of much pertinacity. They seemed to be short of men at Lyncombe; they must have been, or they would not have wanted John.

The tennis crowd was much the same as the year before, only there were more visitors, mostly of a peculiar nature. There were the Stanley Morrises of Park View, Beckenham, and the Hitchcocks and the Bickmores and the Coney Bells. Osmond used to imitate them. "I went all round the teaown." John and Osmond rather hated each other as a rule, but they had a defensive alliance against Gordon Bickmore. He was the limit; what he himself called the fringe. John was sorry to agree with Osmond on any subject, and he would resolve never to do so again; and then he would hear Mrs Morris saying to Mrs Hitchcock, "Delicious frewt, deeh" (just like that). Even Osmond was better than this.

One day a car stopped at the club gate, and a chap and a girl got out.

Osmond said to Esmé, "More freaks arriving."

But she said, "No, it isn't, though—I seem to know the car. Where have I seen that blue car?"

"It's the Tallentyres," Joy said. She was juggling a ball on her racket, and John knew she didn't like the Tallentyres coming to the club.

"So it is. They've got a new car, though. This isn't quite the same as the other blue one—the one Tisted used to drive."

"The club is honoured," Gordon Bickmore said, and Osmond sat on him, because it was not his business to say anything about the Tallentyres.

John noticed that everyone seemed to know about the Tallentyres. They knew the make of the car and

the name of the chauffeur. Some people do get known like that.

It was the brother and the girl who stared. They sauntered to the pavilion, and were met by Mrs Harold Slack, who made a set for them at once. This meant they were good.

They *were* good; John saw them playing later. The staring girl had a deadly overhand service. He thanked heaven he was never likely to have to play against her.

He did not speak to her; he never expected to speak to her. But two or three days later he arrived at the club earlier than the rest of his set, and found the blue car outside and Miss Tallentyre tying her shoe on the step. She leapt out as John went past.

“Can you see my petticoat?”

He did not, of course, think that she was speaking to him. So she whistled through her teeth, and then he had to turn round.

“I said, can you see my petticoat?”

“I’m not looking at it.” John knew this was rather rude, but he also knew that Miss Tallentyre would understand rudeness best.

“Well, have a squint.”

“I don’t know which is petticoat and which is dress.”

“Dress is plain; petty’s got a ridge of embroid. Have a sort of feeling it’s descending behind, only ‘opes not.”

John said, “I can’t see anything.”

He said, averting his eyes hastily, “Hullo, Daisy, anything doing?” Mrs Aumonier hove in sight, and John went to the pavilion, feeling in the mood for a stiff whisky and soda. If he had been older he would have had one.

He had not realised before that girls call petticoats

petties; and that some girls will talk about them to quite strange boys.

Joy arrived at this moment. Joy would not talk about petticoats, though there is no reason why anyone shouldn't, of course. She looked decent in tennis kit, with her hair in a blue snood. She was not pretty, John thought, not as pretty as Peggy; her mouth was too big and her eyes were too small. All the same, she looked quite nice when she screwed up her eyes and dimpled. They walked across the court together talking about her tennis racket, which had a shaky string.

He did not speak to Miss Tallentyre again, and it was not till he was leaving the club that he saw her at all. She was leaning over the rail of the pavilion smoking a cigarette, and when she saw him she leant over farther and blew smoke at him. Then she laughed.

She was what fast girls are like. But he could not help laughing too when he thought of the petticoat, and of what Joy would say. He hoped she did not see him laughing.

She would not care whether he laughed or not. She was a shade better than Grace Husband.

Joy had been changing her shoes in the ladies' dressing-room or she would not have allowed Miss Tallentyre to lean over and blow smoke.

XVIII

THERE'S been a shipwreck."

Eden and Squish came in with the paper.
"In the Atlantic—one of those whacking big
liners—tennis courts on board—ye gods!—tons of
people drowned."

There was a scuffle then.

"Account from survivors—how they can do it beats
me—boats launched—let's have a squint—band plays—
ye gods!—get out of the light."

John read the official account rapidly, while P. D.
read over his shoulder. It said this:

"For a considerable time the unfortunate victims
struggled in the water, but the intense cold ultimately
overcame them. They then began to perish one by one."

That last sentence was awful—"They then began to
perish one by one." They ought not to have said it
like that in a newspaper. He hoped P. D. had not seen
it, that he was reading somewhere else on the page. . . .
There you were in the common-room, shut in and safe,
and in the sea people had been struggling, thinking they
were going to be saved, and suddenly knowing it was too
late. Or did they not know? Did they just die? When
you die, you must be thinking of so many things you
wanted to finish.

And they died in the cold sea.

For a minute he felt ill. He remembered long ago
in Loch Lhui. It was the awful water—the terrible
feeling. He could not think of being drowned; his

knees began to shake and he had to sit down, and clench his teeth and listen to the chaps talking about ordinary things.

"Have you got a stray pair of socks among your clean things? . . . And whose might they be? . . . Jeremiah's, of course. . . . Now you're being funny. Well, you can tell Jeremiah he can come and look for them. . . . I say, I wish you wouldn't sneeze over me. . . . He sneezeth like 'tush, tush' in the Psalms."

John felt all right then and got up. Nobody had noticed anything. It was just idiocy. You had to realise that drowning made you feel like that, and not think about it. With some people it is precipices.

§

The small boys sang songs one wet evening in the Christmas term. It was supposed to be good for them to have to do this. And the seniors very kindly came to listen and criticise.

You criticised extensively. You said things like this: "That kid Purefoy Two's not too excruciating. . . . But woolly, sort of, thinkest thou? Sounds as if he was singing down a rolled-up blanket. . . . Yes, it's not very buckdoodling. . . . Pass along the acid drops, Ernest Barker, you've had 'em a young generation."

They sucked acid drops while the squits sang *Malbrouck s'en va t'en guerre*. There was a refrain that sounded like "tormiron taine," and people round John began humming it, until somebody called down the line that it wasn't "tormiron" at all, but "mironton miron-taine," which looks quite different.

Purefoy Two wept (he had to, because it was a singing game) and sang to Haggard—

*"La Trinité se passe
Mironton mironton mirontaine."*

And everybody sang "Mironton mironton miron-taine," except John.

Then people talked.

"Jonathan, pass the edibles . . . our frugal fare, despise it not." . . . His thoughts were far away. . . . "What's the good of sitting on them? They won't hatch. . . . What's the scheme, Johnny?" P. D. said this under cover of the general talk.

"Anything doing? You look a bit unbracy."

"Oh, I'm fairly braced." John made a suitable pause, and then went straight to the point. "I say, I suppose this'll be my last shouting show."

"It *is* bunk." Bunk was the word then. "Utter and absolute bunk. I never heard anything so purely bunkish in all my life."

"Paulie, I wish your old aunt'd be a sport and send you to College."

"Johnny, Johnny, and that do I. Wouldn't it be a little heaven below?"

"We'd be in the same form and all."

"That we should not. Lord, remember David. He was a mamp. A mamp was he."

"But wouldn't it be a full, perfect and sufficient rag?"

"Old Hus and Co. going strong."

Then the small boys sang "As I sat on a sunny bank," and they all joined in, "On Christmas Day in the morning"—all except John.

John did not sing at all. His voice had gone.

It had gone quite unexpectedly in church. Suddenly he could not sing; he tried, and nothing happened at all. Afterwards it came back, or some of it, but Heap

told him definitely that he would not be any more good to the choir. He wasn't trained enough. Trained voices do not break at fourteen as a rule, but John was only half trained. And he was big for his age, which seemed to have something to do with it. He hated being big for his age and losing his voice. It was beastly.

And P. D. was eight months older, and he hadn't lost his voice at all.

Anyhow, John was going. The next Sunday would be his last, because it was the last Sunday in Advent. Then he was going to Lyncombe for the Christmas holidays, because there was no point in staying.

In January he would go to the College. He did not mind that.

But he was leaving the choir school and leaving the choir, and however long he lived he would never be a singing boy again. It was one of the things that were gone.

§

The last Sunday in Advent was singularly beastly.

After that day John's surplice would not belong to him any more. That seemed to make it more final than anything else.

He and P. D. went to get things ready for Evensong. They managed this. They circumvented Ernest Barker. There was plenty to do; you had to prepare the organ for Heap, turn on the lights and put out the music. This was the most intriguing of your holy tasks. And every time you passed the altar you had to bow to it. Everybody gave hurried nods except the hopeless mamp Ernest Barker, who always lined up as if he were going to salute the flag. John always longed to smite him from behind as he bowed, but this cannot be done.

P. D., however, had evolved a recrimination (Heap said this) by darting across the chancel with such speed that he cannoned Ernest Barker at his holy vigil and sent him spinning. This had come off all right once or twice—until Ernest Barker, turning hastily, cannoned Paul and hurt him severely in the stomach, which was the sort of thing Ernest Barker *would* do.

To-night Ernest Barker was not there, only the apostles, Paul and John. They had not arranged it so that they knew it was arranged exactly. It came like that. They had often done it together before, and knew all the dodges—there was the electric light by the organ to see to, which is a stiff task, and managed better by two people than by one. They switched on all the lights, and that wouldn't do, so they switched them off again; then for a change they switched them all on together (this made a beautiful illusion of lightning in the glass) and all off together. Then P. D. turned on the electricity, which no one is supposed to do at all; and when it had begun to buzz he turned it off, and made the organ hiccup, which was so odd that he turned it on again to see if it was a mistake. It was not a mistake, so he did it again, and by a deplorable accident let fall a book of voluntaries on the treble keys, which made a squeal like the death of several pigs. This was partly John's fault, because he had pulled out *Dulciana* and *Lieblich Gedacht*.

Then the Cherub came over to see what the devil the row was.

"It was the sheep bleating. That was it, yea verily." John then began to improvise. He could, suddenly.

"When you hear my sheep a-bleating
Then you'll know they've come to meeting.
Let's have a tune upon the organ——"

The Cherub was very stern and not amused at all. He said, "Get on, you thrice-sodden fools."

"Thrice-sodden fools" comes out of a book.

John did not mind the Cherub. He continued to improvise.

"Three mouldy little fellows,
Cherub, his socks, and his tie."

Then P. D. had hysterics, and they got on. They were ready in time, and P. D. nodded to the altar three times because he had forgotten to do so on three separate occasions.

Otherwise the service was quite ordinary.

It is a queer fact that you are much more likely to remember things if they are silly.

But one thing was not silly. It happened when John was standing by the chancel rail, and P. D. came up the chancel towards him straight and tall in his violet cassock, with his hair reflecting the light. John knew that he should never think of St George's again without seeing Paul coming towards him up the chancel just like that, looking and laughing, with the light catching the bright ends of his hair.

§

That night John leant out of the window in the dark air. He was hot. St George's had been hot, with the incense hanging about; even the electric fan hadn't been able to clear it off. It was hot for December altogether.

It was clear that night, with stars, and a little wind that made the beech twigs snap. It was queer to think of the stars. He very seldom did think of them, be-

cause you could never think to the end of them. They weren't points of light in the sky, as he used to think when he was a kid, but worlds rushing through space. The world was rushing through space too. It was terrible energy. It was so big and exciting that it made you feel an infinitesimal speck—a sort of bubble. You could not expect to know all about everything; perhaps there were people on thirty billion other planets wanting to know too.

All the same you *did* want to know things.

You could talk to Gilly of course. Gilly would say—you knew quite well what Gilly would say, and how he would say it—that one fact explained them all. If John had argued that God was too big to care (he never had said this, of course), Gilly would answer, "And yet he cared so terribly for you infinitesimal incarnations of energy that he took a body and came among you and experienced everything and died." He would say it just like that, not in a Christian voice—Gilly hadn't got a Sunday voice; and it would sound very decent as he said it.

In a way it would be a perfectly satisfactory explanation, for it did include everything. And John would have nothing to say, except that he hadn't made up his mind. If you knew for certain, it was absolutely satisfying. When you sang, "Ave verum corpus" it seemed as if you did know for certain. But then you looked at the stars, and they were too far away. You couldn't tie things down like that—Gilly thought you could. Christ wasn't a good man who thought he was God and died a long time ago; he was "verum Corpus natum ex Maria Virgine." . . . You had to decide whether you thought it or not—and John wanted to know so badly—he wanted to know, and yet he never would

know for certain till he was dead. It was queer to think of yourself dying and thinking, "Now I shall know all about it."

And there was Heaven. John wasn't sure what he thought about Heaven. Hardly anybody is. They write about sunny Paradise and the calm of Paradise the blest, but they do not know anything at all about it. Some of the hymns they sang at St George's were realer than that. There was one John liked.

For where Heaven is but once begun
There Alleluias be.

And the Cameronian one about the vessels that safely in the haven meet.

He liked them because they did not try to describe heaven.

To-night Heaven was unlikely altogether. It was the stars that made it like that. There seemed no point in going to church and lighting candles and burning incense—except because it was jolly and you liked doing it. If there was a God, he was not that sort of God. Not that night. Sometimes he was, but not then. . . .

It was like Arming and Mordenstair; two different facts that do not connect.

And one strange thing. He had not thought of it before. It was not Mass and incense and singing that made St George's matter. It was not God. You did not go to church because of God. You went, and liked going, because of the things you remembered—things that had happened. Sometimes things they had sung. "Lo! star-led chiefs." That was not God, it was the Cherub and Paul.

It was odd to think that God did not matter in the way Paul mattered.

§

He went to stay with the Cherub for part of the Christmas holidays. It was a new idea, and a decent one.

The Cherub lived at Richmond. He had a brother in Lloyd's, which is mysterious, two sisters, and a really very sporting mother. He had a father too, but he was in Liverpool.

They were the sort of family that makes a row. Phyllis played the piano, and Madeleine the violin, Jack, the brother at Lloyd's, sang baritone, and the sporting mother had the loudest voice of all. She sang "Brahma! Dieu des croyants!" and other things like that; John liked listening to her, though it was tiring if you listened too long. In the evenings they would play poker and casino and finish up with music—all sorts of music. Brahms and Schubert and Mignon and Massenet and Wagner and Gilbert and Sullivan. They sang Gilbert and Sullivan quite properly in parts—not John, of course, but all the others. This was extremely decent to listen to. *I have a song to sing O! Or Strange Adventure!* or the Madrigal out of *The Mikado*. And Jack would sing *I stole the Prince*, and Jack and Madeleine would sing Luis' and Casilda's duet—

I will atone for my disdaining
O well-beloved!

And the Cherub would sing the one that ends—

Of all the captive band the saddest he.

They were a topping family. John hadn't met a topping family before.

He and Ralph went about together a good deal. They went to town for *matinées*, and sometimes in the evening as well. You can do this at Richmond. It was intriguing being in the middle of it all, in the middle of the noise.

But London was queer too.

One night he and the Cherub were late, walking down the Strand to catch the Richmond train at Charing Cross. They were talking quite ordinarily; and suddenly two women passed them, hanging on to each other's arms and shrieking with laughter.

John said, "What a joke," for something to say. But then he saw that two men, officers, were following the women, one on a level with them, only on the opposite side of the pavement, and the other one behind. They went drifting by in the pale light as if they were blown. It was like a sort of procession. There were only four of them, and yet it looked like a procession. It was not nice. It was one of the things you wish you had not seen. But he had seen it.

He did not say anything about it then. But two days later, while he was leaving at Waterloo, something else happened.

They were waiting for John's porter by the parcels office. And they saw a woman. She was all in black, with a black hat, and her face was quite white and her mouth red. No person's face had ever been like that before. She passed them and looked at them, and there was something strange in her face; as if she wanted to speak to them. John spoke without thinking at first.

"I say, *look*. Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Absolutely beastly," the Cherub said. He was not looking amused at all, but quite stern. And suddenly

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John knew what the woman was. He hadn't thought before.

The stories you read in some of the magazines are true.

They turned off in the direction of the bookstall, and began talking about something else. Only John was thinking that it must be beastly to have to go out and do that when you feel rotten and want to be left alone.

He thought so. But perhaps she did not feel like that. He did not say anything to the Cherub.

PART THREE: LORISTON

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XIX

IT was pleasant to sprawl in the dining-room at Loriston on the night of your arrival, with your things unpacked upstairs, and College lying in front of you, not too near to be looming. Through the haze of smoke Snark and the Cherub were dimly visible slacking in armchairs, and doing their best to be discouraging. Josephus lay, large and wooden, on the rug.

"With any reasonable luck we shan't view you at all."

"Don't expect me to take the thlighteth noteth of you, in the unlucky event of your coming within my ken."

"Do I want to see your ugly great phiz?"

"Weigh in with the thigh bone, Snark."

Christopher kept a collection of bones in a drawer, because he was going to be a doctor. He produced the femur, with a nobbly end; presently they went on with the conversation.

"Yes, the Middle School have a pretty thin time on the whole."

"Ethpecially the day boys. Day boyth have a veritable little hell of a time."

"Why, you're a day bug yourself."

"Ceathe that repartee, young sir, or thou shalt verily and indeed experienthe Haviland's *Practical Chem-*

ithtry on thy thkull. Yea. Even so. As I wath thaying—”

“And there's footer. You'll have to play footer, Ming.”

“Well, I've played footer before.”

“Pothibly, but not with Courthope. You have no contheption what it feelth like to be hacked by Courthope. And footer every afternoon, young John. Not just when we feel like it, and not to-day becauthe we think we'll thing a Mixidixy Scale in H. Minor. Oh no. Far from it.”

“You think you're being jolly funny, but you ain't worrying me a bit.”

They howled with laughter. They thought all this was amusing.

“A few Noteth and Jottingth from my Occathional Book. Beware of Cardew' th thecurge. Oft have I seen it reddened with innothent gore.”

“I've had my wrists skinned before now. In the Middle Fifth it was. By Jove! Mingy, you're in the Middle Fifth. Curious coincidence.”

“Look out for Latter's three-foot penthil.”

“Beware of Hugh Black.”

“Beware of Miéville.”

“Keep clear—”

“Oh, shut up.” John had to explode suddenly here. “You needn't go on like Strophe and Antistrophe. Besides, I've forgotten everybody's name.”

“Thou wilt know in the fulneth of time. Then wilt thou thay thou watht not warned. Even tho.” Christopher then subsided and read *The Innocence of Father Brown*, while the Cherub and John talked choir school.

“What's all this about measles? It's a scurvy thing to do. We never did it in my time.”

"Meathleth," Christopher murmured to his pipe. It is a satisfactory word to say.

"The Purefoys brought it back, loathly little devils. New Shute's down and the Haggards and all that mob. Singularly noisome."

"What about P. D.?"

"Oh, P. D.'s all right. He's infectious though. You won't be able to burble about the weather to young Paul yet awhile."

"Shan't I though? Oh, damn it, Ralph."

"Quarantine, of course. Ladies' choir intends to warble forth, and so on."

"O Jerusalem, *damn!*"

It made a sad end to the evening. And College was getting uncommonly near.

§

It was too near. He could not eat his breakfast. It was a mistake not to, but quite unavoidable. And he would not see P. D. all that day, nor the next, nor for as many as you could think of. He started with the others, feeling odd.

There was a tremendous row in the yard (it wasn't a quad, though you might have thought so), which went on till a bell clanked in the school-house tower, when there was a rush for the chapel, everyone fighting to sit next his special friend. John was alone, for the Cherub sang in the choir, and Christopher had vanished in a crowd of seniors. He felt hopeless suddenly—College didn't seem a very great catch after all, and he did not like the looks of the boys he could see. Perhaps it was a huge mistake, the biggest mistake he had ever made.

After Chapel it was interminable. John knew his form, the Middle Fifth, and would have gone there and waited, to simplify matters; only you didn't do it like that. You did it the longest and most roundabout way you could, and left the new boys till the end. The Headmaster read endless lists, none apparently with any attempt at order. John criticised severely in his mind as he heard Upper Remove A Classical followed by Middle Fifth Modern, and then perhaps by Lower Third or Remove B; and after a time he became comatose, and ceased to criticise at all, or indeed do anything but shift from one leg to the other. When you are empty your inside aches. At least John's did, rather unnecessarily. It was painful, and made him long to sit down. The Middle Fifth became a haven of refuge where the weight of your internal organs would be taken off your legs.

It came at last. And there was his form and Mr Latter.

Mr Latter had a very large nose, not particularly heavy looking, but merely immense; his gown was old and shabby, and he was going slightly bald on the top. He gave out one or two notices, and John felt an air of expectancy about the form, as if it were waiting for him to be funny. But his only flight of fancy was to remind it that all handicrafts, wood-carving, etching or illuminating were discouraged in the printed books. This seemed to be a favourite remark, and was very much appreciated.

He then gave a history lecture of exceeding interest.

John did not quite know what he had been expecting, but it was certainly nothing as orderly as this; he might have been in the choir school but for the fact that there were forty boys in the form instead of fourteen. And

it really was a Public School, and you had always heard that Public School masters didn't bother about order. Ilay had said this, and Paddy and Osmond. There were always boys at the back of the room who did what they liked; they threw paper darts, inked, which hit you in the eye, and everybody cribbed all the time.

All this, John saw quite clearly, was bunk. It might be like that at some schools, but it certainly wasn't in Mr Latter's form at Arming College. The back rows yawned a little, and frittered with pens and inkpots before the end, but nobody upset benches or threw darts, or behaved in any way like the boys in books. Most of the form were listening to the lesson, which was an interesting one—about the Siege of Paris. Boys who had been in Paris were allowed to talk about it. They had a diagram of the Paris forts on the blackboard. It was good stuff.

The Cherub met John outside and said, "Well, what cheer?"

John was not going to give too much away at once. He said, "I've got a first-class stomach-ache."

§

The Middle Fifth did not receive John badly as a whole. There were things you had to put up with. . . . But that is school. And he liked Latter and Macfarlane and de Medewe, the maths master. He particularly liked de Medewe, who was of a sporting nature.

There was plenty to do. There was footer.

John played footer religiously, not because he wanted to in the least, but because some of the day boys shirked. They got a bad time from Courthope and the games

masters, but if they were the sort of people who shirked because shirking was dear to them, they were not likely to mind that much. In order that Courthope should not think him a slacker, John went up to the field even when he was not down on the lists. Probably Courthope did not think anything at all about him.

He liked Ruggier fairly well, but he was obvious, and knew it. Once Courthope called him something he had never heard before. John himself was surprised, but everyone else seemed amused, and he heard some of the pack telling the rest what Courthope had said. He looked the word up in the Dictionary that evening, but he had to look two or three other things up before he understood it at all; and even then it seemed that something must be which couldn't . . .

You missed that sort of thing at the choir school. It put you behind.

When you grew accustomed to College, you felt as if you had been there always. You changed every afternoon, and walked up to the practice field with Carshalton, Ushant, Bung (who had not been christened thus), Mayhew and the Sothebys. After about a month you felt as if the whole previous stretch of your existence had been spent in walking up the hill with Carshalton, Ushant, Bung, Mayhew and the Sothebys.

§

College had a good library. It was Mr Rawstorne's special hobby. And it was quite the correct thing, not toxy at all, to drift in and look at *Punch* or *The Graphic*. Occasionally you borrowed a book. Big chaps read the history section a good deal.

On one particular afternoon John was alone till de Medewe came in.

John liked de Medewe. He was maths, and he had rather a pleasant sense of humour: you hadn't seen it much, but you felt there were possibilities.

They greeted each other. De Medewe had come in for a Meredith.

"By the way, you read Francis Thompson."

John found this astounding.

"Saw you buying him in Slater's—that's how I know."

John remembered that there *had* been a man. He hadn't known de Medewe then, of course.

"Nice man. 'The Mistress of Vision'—wasn't that the one you wanted?"

It is strange how people remember little things like that.

"There's only bits of it in the book I've got. I think it begins in the middle."

"Yes, I remember it does. 'On Ararat there grew a vine—'"

"'When Asia from her bathing rose.'" John followed him on.

"But it leaves all the best part out. The beginning is beautiful. 'Secret was the garden, set in the pathless awe'—how does it go? 'Mine eyes saw not and I saw.'"

John liked that. He saw it going to music. "Secret was the garden, set i' the pathless awe." He wanted to go on.

"Could you tell me, sir, if there's a Francis Thompson in the library?"

"No, there isn't. We're rather deficient in modern poets, as I dare say you've noticed. But I can lend

you my copy if you want to read that poem. Come round to Masters' Room B. some time directly after school—or come round to my rooms—and I'll give it to you."

John did go round to de Medewe's rooms. He went often, for de Medewe had books, and could tell you things about them. And he had modern books, which John had never been able to get hold of before. He had Conrad and Wells and Bennett and Belloc and Chesterton and Rupert Brooke, and all the rest that you knew hardly more than by name. It was fine.

At first he gave John things to read—Alice Meynell, and Thompson's *Prose Essays*, and T. E. Brown. Then John took to coming in out of hours and reading to himself. De Medewe seemed slightly apprehensive that he might get hold of something unsuitable, but this only amused John, and was quite useless. De Medewe had set the ball rolling with Thompson, and he couldn't stop it after that.

John read Richard Middleton's *Poema*. He read "The Lass that died of love," and thought it over. This he kept to himself.

He also read Rupert Brooke. Rupert Brooke was young; he was a topping-looking chap.

It was possible to talk to de Medewe about things which you would not have dreamt of uttering to anyone else. This was queer. Rupert Brooke was one of the things.

"I wonder he dared write like that."

De Medewe put on his pince-nez and looked at the page. And the words that John had meant were these:

For the uttermost years have cried and clung
To kiss your mouth to mine.

This is an awkward thing to talk about.

"Why?"

"Why, because afterwards he must have thought what a fool he'd been."

De Medewe did not say anything. He hung the silly little gold chain of his glasses over his ear.

"It's all right at the time. At least I suppose it is. You think you're speaking the truth. But think of waking up next morning and remembering what you've said—"

"Menzies, you're a Scot—a cold, canny Scot. Scotch people never live for the moment; they're for ever thinking of the—"

"I know it sounds rotten, all calculating and beastly. But—all this and then things like *that*." He turned over to "Jealousy," which is indeed a beastly poem.

"That's cynical. You shouldn't have read that. Besides, it isn't true."

"But I wanted to. I believe it is true, too."

"And because some aspects of it aren't romantic enough to please you, you're against anyone committing himself. John!" It was the first time de Medewe had called him that.

"Well, it's like this. I wish I could explain. I can't, you know. But I knew a man, and he was supposed to be jolly good and pi and all that—a parson, he was—and all the time he was carrying on with a girl."

"That, unfortunately, is not rare."

"Well, I thought about it, and at first I thought there was something rather decent about it, and that it was jolly sporting of him to risk losing his job because of her. Then when I thought again it seemed beastly somehow to think of him saying idiotic things,

and catching her eye, and winking, like the fools here do in the streets."

"Do they?"

"Well, can't you see what I mean? I thought of it as something jolly high and fine, that made you feel weird like jolly good music does. But it doesn't seem to be like that at all, really, only winking and giggling and silliness."

"You want it all to be high romance."

"Oh, high romance, no. It's not perfect gentle knights and Sir Galahads and hopeless bunkheads like that. It's just not being futile and mimsy and idiotic. Well, and then a girl got keen on me"—De Medewe grinned here—"and I saw all that, and it was all trying to make me do things for her, and carry on, and be silly. You read all these things, and you think, 'Hullo, it's something rather gorgeous,' and all the time it's only an idiotic fool kissing a giggling ass."

"You're very sweeping. You won't allow it any redeeming feature. Have you read Patmore's *Angel in the House*?"

"No, sir, only the *Unknown Eros*. That's topping—that really is fine, but of course that's gods."

"Well, you read *The Angel*. I'll lend it to you, and you'll find it gives you the other side. It's modern too—not King Arthurs and Galahads and gentle knights."

This was an interesting conversation.

§

John did read *The Angel in the House*, but he did not find it very convincing. This was partly because he read other things at the same time, which seemed

to neutralise it. De Medewe did not know of all of these.

He did not know, for instance, that he had left *Une Vie*, by Guy de Maupassant, about. But perhaps he did know, for it was shoved at the back of the other books. John fished it out, and read it, and meditated thereon.

He meditated a good deal on various subjects.

But he did not stop working or playing footer. You can think of other things. Sometimes he got ahead of the others, and walked down from footer by himself.

You did not walk down from footer, you ran. It was cold under the Downs.

One day while John was running Miéville caught him up. John hardly knew Miéville; he was a senior, but not a prefect. They ran down the hill together.

Miéville was a big, hefty chap, and he had blue eyes. One does not notice people's eyes as a rule, but Miéville's must have been very blue, for John knew them. He smiled, too—the sort of smile that shows you do not care.

Miéville did not care for anything.

A day or two later they picked each other up again. On the third day Miéville waited for John.

That was the day when a crowd of running boys overtook them. The Cherub was one, and he called out to John, "Look alive—you'll be late for tea."

John did not hurry. Miéville smiled, and John thought he was amused at the Cherub. He only said, "A well-meaning fellow."

Then they both laughed, and John was intrigued with Miéville. He strolled home and had a bath. He was late for tea.

The Cherub was in a preaching mood that evening. He said, "Look here—you'd better look out."

John said, "What have I got to look out about?" He was not going to stand preaching.

The Cherub said quite calmly, "That I should think you knew."

John said, also calmly, "I am unaware."

The Cherub got a little rattled at this. He said, "Well, don't go about with seniors. It's bad policy."

"Lots of chaps do. It *has* been known."

"And with particular seniors it's utterly damnable policy."

"Thank you for nothing."

"As I should imagine you know if you've got the brains of a louse."

After which rude remark the Cherub shut up. John was annoyed and angry; he remembered Miéville saying lazily, "A well-meaning fellow." He *was* a well-meaning fellow, and John had very little use for him.

A strange thing happened next day. He heard from Paul. He had almost forgotten P. D., but when he read the letter he remembered.

P. D. was in Shropshire. He had gone back because of the whooping cough which followed measles and now he had it. It was rough luck. He said, "I shall cough my puce voice to Jericho." For a minute it seemed like Paul talking.

But he soon forgot him, because that night he had dreams.

The next day he was sorry he had been beastly to the Cherub. But he did not tell him so because he couldn't. He couldn't talk to the Cherub. He couldn't even write a decent letter to P. D.

Miéville asked him to write in the holidays, and John said he would. He thought he might be able to write a decent letter to Miéville.

XX

HE spent the holidays at Lyncombe with a worried mother.

He was sorry for Mummy. It seemed to have occurred to her suddenly that as he was nearly fifteen, and at a Public School, he ought to be Told Things. She thought one reaches fifteen without knowing. There is a mistake somewhere; it had been long ago in the Walt Whitman time that he really wanted to be told, and then there had been nobody. But now there were books and College and Miéville. One does know things. But Mummy evidently imagined he knew a very little all wrong. He knew she thought this because she had bought some books and he read them; he found one in the drawing-room where she had left it by mistake. It was called *What shall I tell my Son?* by Eunice Jessop, and was the sort of book wherein your boy sits at your feet while the sun sets in the west, and you, smoothing his hair, run rapidly through the process of reproduction in plants, animals and human beings (the last very sketchy and full of hiatus). At the end your boy looks up at you with a dawning wonder in his eyes ("dawning wonder" is good. Eunice Jessop must have had some fun out of writing that book)—dawning wonder in his eyes, and says so simply, "Mother, I never thought about it like that before." Then, throwing his arms round your neck, he whispers, "I shall love you more and not less for what you have told me." There was a great deal more,

some of it indicating that Eunice Jessop did not know as much as an average boy.

It would have been wonderful read aloud in a religious monotone.

Besides this, there was nothing in the holidays; they were just dull. He read a good deal, and went to Minehead with Mummy. The only interesting thing was the post, because of Miéville. John wrote to Miéville.

He did not write to de Medewe or the Cherub or P. D.

Then it was the summer term, with cricket. He was not looking forward to it very much except for one reason. And he was not looking forward to Loris-ton at all.

The Cherub as chaperon. Miéville had said that Gabriel the archangelic chaperon. "There was a young prefect called Rafe, whose morals were perfectly safe." That was Miéville too.

When he did arrive there was news.

John was not pleased with the news. He said, "What's the name of the mouldy little blighter." He was so bored with the thought of a fourth boy living in the house that he did not even ask this as a question but rather made it as a statement.

The Cherub said, "Gods! there you have me. Let's see. I did know. Snark, what's the name of the bun?"

"Menzies. Oh, I beg pardon, *that* bun. It ethcapeth me."

"But Mrs Grant'll know. What's the new chap's name, Mrs Grant?"

"He's a very—" Mrs Grant was beginning when Christopher rudely interrupted with, "Shut up, mother, you don't know anything about it. Mother never re-

memberth anyone'th name, so it's fatuouth to inquire of her. It'th thomething to do with a fithing village, unleth I mithtake greatly. Yarmouth, or thome un-holy thpot."

"Oh, Grimsby, that's it. Isn't it, Mrs Grant?"

"Yes, that's it; Grim——"

"Peter Grimsby. I knew there was an apostle lurking somewhere. Peter Grimsby. It'll be a nice little pal for you. We shan't be bothered with you any more."

"Yes, you will. D'you suppose for a minute that I'm going to hook on to a cake called Peter Grimsby? Not much. Grimsby. Phew! I can see him—a great, flabby, fish-eyed fool, with spindle legs and a pot-belly."

"Really, m'lad, your language is not nice. Did you pick it up in the holidays?"

John half laughed, but he was not in a laughing mood.

"I bet you anything within reathon that within two dayth you and Peter'll be thworn allies, thick as thieveth."

"I bet you anything you *like* I won't."

"Taken. Now you'll be utterly done in the optic. The lad cometh on Friday, and on Monday I demand of you even unto the half of your kingdom."

"Then you won't get it." And John really meant what he said. Christopher didn't, of course.

§

The thought of Peter Grimsby continued to irritate John. It was undeniably true that Mrs Grant had a perfect right to have a fourth boy in the extra bedroom

if she wanted to. It was her business, and her bedroom. But he didn't *want* a fourth boy; it had always been the three of them—the Cherub, Snark and Ming—having their own jokes and signals and codes and allusive conversations. Another chap would butt in, and want to know what things meant, and criticise, and bag your bath. And the Snark would never be funny at all, as he was with the Cherub and John. He was always snarky with strangers. Added to this, John did not like Peter. He knew just what Peter would be like, the sort of impossible freak who goes to cinemas and brushes his hair back all wet. There would be something about Peter—if it wasn't sleekness it would be something else.

He was to arrive by an evening train: he came, John understood, from some weird place in the Midlands—Wolverhampton, most likely, or Kidderminster. John had asked Mrs Grant, but she seemed vague, and had said first Leicester and then Cardiff: to which Snark had observed, "Mother, your topography ith unthertain and your memory fatuouth." Mrs Grant did not seem to know much about Peter, certainly; but then nobody could possibly want to know much about Peter.

They make carpets at Kidderminster—or kettles. It was enraging.

He went out for a run with Christopher on the Downs in the afternoon. Christopher was a bore; he was slow, and wouldn't start, and when he did start he wouldn't stop, but dragged John to the disused lighthouse three miles out. They reached home very dishevelled and covered with mud, John ready to fight till death for the first bath. He was prepared to fight first for the scraper, but Christopher unaccountably left it to him, and disappeared into the house, muddy

boots and all. This was not allowed, and John virtuously scraped his own boots and wondered at it; he wondered still more when Christopher blundered out again and put his head round the door.

"Laddie, we made a *faux pas*. The name wathn't Peter Grimthby after all. It's Paul Dythart, and you've loht your bet."

And he was gone, while John cried "Wha—at?" at the top of his voice. It was one of the cases when you know you have heard wrong. The odd thing was that Paul did come out himself directly afterwards, in new tweeds.

"Is this a Johnny that I see before me?"

The new tweeds obsessed John.

"Paulie, what the devil are you doing in knicker-bockers?"

Christopher reappeared just then to remark, "John, allow me to prethent you to your new playfellow, Peter Grimthby. Peter, thith is John. I hope you'll get on together, boyth, and be—ah—fatht friends."

John was still calm.

"Oh, you're Peter Grimsby, are you? Lord! I might have guessed."

"It wath quite impoth."

"Well, you clout, what do you think you're doing here? Paulie, I don't like those breekhs. Sad but true."

"Well, come upstairs while I wash my hands in innocency. *Lavabo—lavabis—lavabimus.*"

They went upstairs. John had not talked in the Psalms of David since Christmas; he had almost forgotten the catch-words. He hadn't said "Cheers and some laughter" since he saw P. D.

He said it now.

And P. D. said, "Resurrection of Us and Co."

John had to find out about this resurrection.

"Now, out with it. Explain. What do you imagine you're doing here anyway?"

"No, I know. 'Twas to be a secret to surprise the little laddie. Good job I wasn't here, or I should have biffed it out. Cherub says he only just ate it in time once or twice."

"Oh, *Cherub* knew, did he? And what's the secret? Don't meander about like—like—like the River Meander. Classical allusion. Get hence—spit it out."

Paul sat on the edge of the bath.

"Well, 'tis a long tale and full of bones and blood. Gilly went up to see Aunt Mary."

"Gilly did what?"

"Gilly got it on the nut quite suddenly, and he went up to see Aunt Mary."

"He went up to see Aunt Mary! What *has* come over the man?"

"I thought it was fairly touched myself," Paul admitted. "However—there you are. Mistake me not, he does not love her and ask her hand in marriage."

"Nobody would, I should think."

"Oh—she's not so bad. Anyway, they fixed up all sorts of fixtures, and I'm to board here and God knows what."

"Good egg. 'Are you coming to Coll? My lord, Paulie, what a—'"

P. D. balanced on the bath. "No, I'm not going to Coll. Aunt Mary—didn't think she could manage it."

"But what *are* you going to do? You can't stay at school for ever."

P. D. still balanced. And John suddenly wished that he hadn't asked that question.

"Well, you know I'm not frightfully distinguished for brain, so Gilly had an idea I might be some good at book-keeping and all that rot, because I can write fairly well, and do maths fairly well and all that, so I'm going to learn it all up at the Technical School."

"But the Tec. doesn't take you after you're—"

"Oh, I shall hang on till I'm sixteen. And when that day dawns I'm going into Lloyd's Bank."

John wished P. D. hadn't had to tell him this. It was beastly; it was Aunt Mary's fault. He loathed Aunt Mary. Thinking of her made him say something he had not meant to.

"Aunt Mary didn't kick up a dust."

"Oh, *she* didn't kick up a dust."

A definite effort was needed. John shied the soap full in P. D.'s face, causing him to collapse backwards.

"I have lien among the pots' . . . Oh, crumbs! it's all soapy. Fancy, someone did have a bath here once—not you, my fuggy lad. . . . Less of it there, young Grimsby . . . where the fishing-nets come from."

But John felt the air was not clear. They had not finally had this out.

§

They had it out on Sunday night.

Sunday night had been fervent. They had the intriguing hymn where "damnation" come in. But the last verse is the best:

Tie in a living tether
The prince and priest and thrall.
Bind all our lives together,
Smite us and save us all.

It is a decent hymn. There is no mush about it. Hymns cannot be mushy when they are about all the nation.

After supper he and Paul went for a walk. The big boys were smoking in the dining-room, and Mrs Grant was clearing away. Nobody was helping her clear away, and John had one pang of remorse, only he wanted to go out with P. D.

They talked of nothing in particular at first.

"And you mean to tell me that your yowl hasn't gone yet, with all that coughing. . . . Before Evin I do. Before Evin do I . . . Hercules the child marvel. The eighth wonder. . . . Nasty 'acking corf it was too. Oh, a very nasty corf. . . . I say, I'll have to learn up shorthand for 'toothache,' and 'demivoix,' and 'Dhuinewassel.' . . . It'll take up a good bit of the day, you know, won't it? . . . I'll drop off the map, you know, if you want me to."

John hadn't caught the last remark.

"What?"

"What?"

"What did you say then?"

"Well, what I said."

There was a pause. John knew this was what P. D. had been meaning to say all along. It was the sort of thing you can only say as if it was an accident. And he couldn't ask him to say it again.

"Let me earnestly request you not to talk bunk."

"'Tisn't bunk."

"It is. It's utterly mimsy wash, unworthy of a youth of your capacity."

"I'm not such a mamp I can't see things. And I don't mean to be a blinkin' incubus, whatever you may say."

"What I say is that you're being stupid. Colossally stupid, my boy."

"Thanks."

They stood leaning over the wall that bounded the big playing field. John had one more thing to say, and he had to make his voice sound right.

"Of course you can drop off if you *want* to."

"I don't."

"Neither do I, so shut up."

They did not speak for some time after that. But it was alive, somehow. Something was alive, and yet nothing had happened. When things happen they are finished; it is only when you cannot say or do anything that they go on and on.

XXI

THE term began on Monday. And everybody groaned and groused and shouted because it was time to go and the tea was too hot to drink.

"*You know the lining of my mouth is the tendereth thing on earth. Then why inflame it wantonly at such a critical moment? A moment fraught with infinite pothibil——*"

"Methinks I hear the jocund note of the College bell."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like cheap Anthony Hope novelth. You can't do it, and it only annoyth me. Mother, for Godth dear thake, give me my health certificate."

"Christopher—really!"

"O merciful heavens, yes! Where the devil is mine? Now where did I put that damnèd thing?"

"Everyone seems very full of language this morning," Mrs Grant said, smiling. Mrs Grant had her strong points. She would take with calmness the perfectly nice swear words which it was proper to use before her. Probably she thought you did not know any others.

"It's enough to *make* one lay out language, Mrs Grant. . . . John, apologithe for thy foul-mouthed expletives in the prethenthe of my mother, or I cleave thee to the chine. . . . What's the chine? . . . Who's talking like Anthony Hope now? . . . Oh, lad, lad, do

buck on. . . . Bunk off, Paul. You'll be late yourself."

At last everybody did bunk off, health certificates and all; Paul to the Technical School with his black and gold cap flung very rakishly on. And if he felt beastly about it, he did not tell John. . . . The others tore up College Road to the tune of Christopher's favourite song:

Ding dong, ding dong, we gallop along,
For this is my wedding mo-ho-rning.

It amused John to think of the contrast between this term and his first. Then he had not been able to eat any breakfast, and had been apprehensive and cold and uncomfortable; now he had made a hearty meal, and didn't care a curse for school.

§

Christopher was "doing" Anatomy that term. He brought home books with curious diagrams, and bits of bone, which John learnt were ulnas and radiuses, or radii. These joined the femur in the drawer, and came in handily in the family scraps. They talked bones solidly night after night, and John never forgot the thirty-three spinal vertebrae and their divisions. Christopher drew beautiful cross-sections of these intriguing things, and coloured them.

From bones they advanced to arteries, and here Christopher made himself a nuisance. He stopped one in John's neck without much difficulty, and it only felt as if your eyes were starting out of your head; but when he tied a tourniquet on the Cherub's arm it was twisted to such a degree of strangulation that the

bland Cherub fairly lost his temper. Christopher was calm. He said, "That shows it was some sweaty tourniquet."

Christopher could do marvellously small things with his large hands.

Preparation was almost too much of a rag nowadays. The Cherub said it was. This was mostly due to the Snark, whose anatomical researches aroused a lively interest in the home circle. Paul secured a treatise brought home by the inquiring Christopher one evening, and read the alluring title, "*The Nervous, Digestive and Respiratory Systems. Their Functions.* By Alexander Maclure, F.R.C.S., M.R.C.P. (Edin.). Oh, lord some book. What's Edin? . . . Let's see, Paulie. . . . 'It cannot be insisted too strongly that digestion begins in the mouth.' . . . Not a nice book, Snark. No. . . . Lord! just to think of living all these years and never knowing *that* before. I always thought— Well, Alexander knows—oh, he knows. . . . Little Alexander's dead. . . . Oh, there's a sweet wee diagram. 'The Ascending Colon.' . . . Paul, hush thy childish prattle. Refined company this is. . . .

What I liked about that party was
They was all of 'em so refined. . . .

Oh, but it's passing interesting. Where's the semi-colon? . . . Do not make game of a theriouth thubject. . . . Who's making game? I ought to know. Had semi-colic often enough in my time. It's what you get in church when you've got to sing a solo. . . . Oh, hush thee, my babie. . . . Good word, Paulie. . . . say, we're being hellish bright this evening. Like people in a book."

"A Thociety novel," Christopher murmured, tapping his forehead with a small bone.

"A Society novel with the Snark in reach-me-downs."

"Thank God I do not go into Thothiety."

"I guess Society thanks God too."

"My young apothle, you're getting impudent. Let uth have no more of it."

"I should like to write a book," John said. He didn't want to particularly; but if he talked he forgot school, and he wanted to forget it just then. "And take off all the things you find in other books. All the things that couldn't possibly happen."

"Anything can pothibly happen."

"No, but I mean the sort of novels where the heroine marries the hero, and gives him the devil of a time, and won't let him kiss her because she isn't *sure*, she doesn't know. Love hasn't come to her——"

"Love is piffing. Wonder if any of us'll ever be in love. I'm sure I shan't."

"Oh, hop it, Paulie. Go on, John."

"Oh, them he falls down a mine, and lies moaning all night, and choke damp sets in, and he thinks it is the end. But they rescue him, more dead than alive, and on the last page she comes slowly towards him with outstretched arms and a half-murmured 'Why, Alan, it was you all the time.'"

"'And I never knew it.' Without a word he folded her clothe in hith strong armth. John, you've been reading penny noveletth."

"So've you. But it'd be rather a rag to get that in. And the girl who lets the young man think she's her own maid or secretary or something, and he marries her thinking she's penniless, his sweet wild rose——"

"Then she dithclotheth to him the fact that she hath a thouhand a day——"

"And with a muttered 'Rosemary, I can forgive most sins, but I cannot forgive deception. I will not be a pauper living on my wife,' he strides away to South America, and doesn't come back till the last chapter."

"Ming, this has points. You must write a novel."

"Oh, me write a novel! And then there's the small kid called Laddie, with golden curls and a ham-frill and sky-blue pantaloons. He meets Dick Effingham, the strong, clean-limbed, faultlessly tailored hero, on the road, and says, 'My Auntie Hermione sewed my breeches. They are just the colour of her eyes.' So he goes, hand in hand with the wee boy, to see Auntie Hermione, who is picking honeysuckle in an arbour. And she is the lady of his dreams."

Christopher gurgled.

"O frabjouth day! Don't forget the thchool touch, young John. It'th quite the thing nowadayth. If you write from the point of view of a cloithtered nun you won't go far wrong."

"When I know more of tactics than a novice in a nunnery.' I don't know anything about boys, bless your boots."

"No, of courthe you wouldn't. It ithn't nethethary. Make Guy have athpirathions when he thees Hugh playing cricket with the Abbey thpire pointing heavenwardth. And detheribe a cricket match at all cotht. The old women who read it won't grathp a word, but they'll think ith atmothphere."

"You might let him be saved from crime by hearing the choir-boys sing," the Cherub suggested. "Choir-boys are always a draw."

"Yes, that's a dodge. The sweet, clear——"

"But, O young John, a word of warning. Be careful of the nature of your crime. Maiden aunth are tho thutheptible."

"Lord, yes, Snark. Alice and Claude Askew. What are you thinking of? A golden sovereign—or that third glass of champagne—he drained it to the dregs, and immediately a subtle light-heartedness infected him—"

"The inthidious wine thspread ith fumes over his entire being—"

"And *then* he heard the choir-boys sing. Let me go on. The sweet, clear voices of the choristers—choristers is the word—ringing out in the old hymn,

Gird thy heavenly armour on,
Wear it ever night and day.

It is too much. He falls on his knees and buries face in hands. End of chapter."

"John, thith ith immenthe. You mutht write this book. You're jutht the thort of maniac who could."

"Yes, old hat. And read it to us in the evenings."

John laughed. He hadn't meant it seriously; he had never imagined he could write anything, except essays on "Naval Supremacy."

"Snark, we'll collaborate, or whatever it is."

"Proud, I'm thure. Nothing your old aunt couldn't read, mind."

"Lord, no."

Paul had been wrapped in meditation. He now came out with a proposition. "I say, *don't* people know when they're in love?"

"Of courthe they do. But if they knew it in novelth, there wouldn't be any novelth."

This required to be thought over.

§

So they wrote a novel.

To be quite exact, it wasn't a novel; but if you didn't call it one, it was difficult to know what to call it. As a matter of fact, it turned into a series of episodes, lightly connected, original in the sense that they certainly had not happened before, and each meant to be faintly reminiscent of a certain author or a certain style. The episodes themselves were easy enough to plan and develop, and John personally found his chief difficulty in repressing tendencies to exaggeration. Snark was useful here. He was not particularly inventive himself, but he knew infallibly what not to put, and John found him an invaluable critic. In the "Laddie" chapter, for instance, it was John who wanted to sit down and let himself rip, and Christopher who stopped him. He said, "I have no ute for lampoon. I am a thatirith" —which is even more satisfactory to say than "measles."

So John was a satirist too.

They wrote in spasms—at least John wrote, after discussion, and read it to Christopher; if Christopher chortled, it would pass.

It was amusing, working with Christopher. They wrote six episodes, and read them to the family.

The first was called "The Red Macaw: a Study in Subtleties," and was chiefly remarkable for some hitherto unpublished glimpses of the ways of the upper classes, especially duchesses. John read it, because he was easier to understand; and the audience quite fell into the trap Christopher had prepared for them, and asked, "Where's the Red Macaw?" But there wasn't a red macaw, because it was a study in subtleties.

Then there was "My Lady Points the Way," followed by "Diana Deliberates: or a Maid with a Man," which was, John thought, quite as good as the serial stories in the papers—only not so long, of course. And there was "The Minster Monster Match," in the course of which Paul had hysterics and fell into the coal-scuttle. And there was John's own favourite, "Boy's Big Man," which was very sweet. . . . And lastly "The Honeysuckle Moon," which wound up everything to a right degree of mushiness. John had wanted to call this "The Mush Moon," but Christopher would have none of it. Christopher was right.

The audience was enthusiastic.

"And that's the end? My God! I'm smiling. . . . My God, so'm I. . . . Do you s'pose that people'll see you're having 'em in the eye? . . . Well, if they saw it, we wouldn't be having 'em in the eye. . . . Quite clear that. Besides, there won't be anybody *to* see it. . . . I say, buzz over the manuscript. Want to read that mampsy cricket match all over again. . . . Vote of thanks to Alice and Claude Askew. . . . Carried unanimously. . . . Cheerth and thome laughter."

§

De Medewe saw the united effort. He did not count.

John often went round to de Medewe, generally accompanied by Paul. De Medewe liked Paul at once, and told John to bring him. . . . So they went together, and ranged the book-shelves; or de Medewe would read them Chesterton or Belloc while they sprawled about the balcony and ate sweets. They had the whole of *Father Brown* in this way; which is indeed a decent and utterly satisfactory book read aloud and listened to with

chocolates. And they had *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, which Paul liked better than John, and *Erewhon* and *The Country of the Blind*, which John liked better than Paul. He was having a dream at this time of climbing down huge slopes into forgotten valleys. It is a splendid dream. . . . And they had manias. John had the Chesterton mania, in which you say odd things suddenly—things like “Blue bugs at Beckenham”; and Paul had the Edwin Drood mania, and was working it all out in his head.

One thing John noticed. De Medewe had turned out his books, and had removed *Une Vie* and some of the others. He did not mind this. He didn’t want to read *Une Vie*, or think about those things at all.

So he gave de Medewe the United Effort.

This was one evening: on the next he went in again, because he naturally wanted to know what De Medewe thought of it.

“By the way, de Medewe, what about those things of mine?”

“Oh, your things. Yes, your things. They’re on the window-sill, I think.” He got up to find them.

“Of course I only wrote ‘em really to amuse the lads. We wrote ‘em I mean. We were gassing about modern novels, and I said I’d like to do a skit. Snark did most of it, really. I think probably it isn’t skittish enough, but Snark said not to be too obvious. We wanted to know what you thought.”

De Medewe stood by the window holding the papers. And suddenly John knew that they had “had” de Medewe—had him on toast. He might, of course, be mistaken, but he rather imagined not.

De Medewe thought they were serious.

It was such a lark that John nearly laughed; but he had learnt not to laugh.

"Look here, J., do you mind if I don't criticise to-night? I've got a lot to say, but I want to go over the things again first. Unless you want them back."

"Oh, lord no. Keep 'em as long as you like."

Then he escaped, to tell Snark, and chortle. But de Medewe was saved. He never knew John knew; if there was anything to know.

The matter did not end there. De Medewe, having read the Effort, propounded a scheme which John could not help seeing was a sound one.

"Look here, I've got a little exercise in ingenuity for you. Take one of those skits—your favourite one of the golden-haired child if you like—and rewrite it as a serious short story."

"You mean, leave out the skit part. Boy won't be able to wear pants the colour of Auntie's eyes if I do that."

"Obviously not. But you can keep your situation—young man, small boy, girl—and develop it, as it might develop ordinarily."

"I see. Rather a gibe, but a damned binge, so to speak. I'll do it when I've got an hour to waste. What's the book on the little table under *Erewhon*?"

John did do it. He did not tell Christopher.

It was very much harder; he had not realised how difficult it would be. Though you are in real life yourself, it is ten times more difficult to discover how real people would behave than to invent how they wouldn't. This is strange but true. But he did it, and gave it to de Medewe to read.

De Medewe was queer about it. He was serious. He took it to bits and criticised; John told him why he

had done things and hadn't done other things. The girl wasn't pretty because girls aren't; not ordinary girls. There was no end to the story, because stories have not an end. They cannot have.

Then de Medewe said, "John, my son, you can write."

It was rather embarrassing, because he said it as if he meant it.

John said, "Oh, pish!" It is difficult to know what to say at these awkward moments. And the odd thing was that he felt he could.

He felt it as he was undressing that night. It came back to him. He had pictured and written out this absurd story that didn't matter, but it would be possible to picture and write out things that did really matter. Things that were somewhere inside you.

He leant out of the window to think about it. There were no stars, only thick dark clouds, and he in his pyjamas watching them. . . . He could not catch his thoughts, they swam away out of his reach. Thoughts hurt. . . .

§

These interesting conversations and the labour they involved were useful in making John forget school.

He had known things were happening long before he knew what they were. Bung and Sotheby One were talking on the asphalt, and when John joined them they looked important. So he knew. And there was a queer air about Latter's form; John would have known something was going on even if he had not heard the tail-end of Bung's conversation.

Later on he knew about it himself.

At the moment that he heard it did not matter, but soon afterwards it was like a hammer somewhere that hurt. It was horrible.

The most awkward part was the Cherub. He had a feeling that the Cherub would say something about it; he could not talk to him without showing that he knew.

But Ralph was decent. He did not say anything till they were so near the gate of Loriston that there would be no need to say much. Christopher was not there. They would not have spoken at all if Christopher had been there.

The Cherub said, "You heard."

As a rule it is hateful when people talk allusively; but here you had to.

John said, "Yes, I heard."

The Cherub hesitated. He seemed to be struggling to find the right thing to say. John could feel his mind. . . .

He spoke before he thought. He said, "I'm awfully sorry." For he was sorry—sorry and ashamed and glad.

The Cherub said something between his teeth. He was not sorry. He could not be sorry, because he was a prefect.

They did not say much more. The Cherub told John a little—about the book. . . . He had heard about the book from the other chaps. They had said that even the Headmaster did not know some of the things.

But he did not tell Ralph about the note. Nobody knew. He had burnt it in the kitchen fire because he wanted to be sure it was not anywhere.

But perhaps last term he would not have burnt it.

When they were going in at the gate the Cherub said, "I know you. . . . you thought I was a blasted nurse-

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maid. But when I saw him trying to get you dangling on the line I couldn't *have it*——”

John said, “It's all right.” Then they went in and played casino with Snark and P. D.

XXII

J OHN continued to write.

Towards the middle of the term an entertainer came to College. He was not important except that he told a funny story about two boys and a treacle tin, which filled John with the divine muse.

It began, "I say, old fellow, let's go out and get some grub at Mother Dixey's." (Anything in the nature of a bun shop was always "Mother" Somebody's.)

"I'm on, old chap. We'll have a rare tuck-in." And away went the two chums arm in arm.

Christopher's verdict was, "On my holy thoul, thith ith too thick." But John didn't think so. A certain kind of reader really does believe that chaps call each other "chum" and "old fellow."

"Do lads ever talk like that? Paulie, you were a boy once, I seem to remember."

"The Boy Scouts do. Otherwise nix."

"Oh, Boy Scouts. P. D. the Boy Scout, the gay Dugong, with ninety-six tenderfeet badges. Old fellow, do your good turn and get my geometrical implements. They're on my bed. Zing a zing. Boom, boom."

"P. D. the Coastwarden, the Backwoodsman, and the wild-goose chase is doing nix good turns just at present. Having a little time orf."

"Oh, Paulie, do be a sport. Such a nice lad you are."

"Ho yus, aren't I?"

"Ceath drivelling, infanth. Such is not the way chumth talk."

"No, we'll have to reform. There's the post."

"Ye holy thoulth."

"Who in hottest hell's writing to you from the Majestic?"

It did not at once occur to John that the only possible person was Mrs Taggart. He never did remember about Mrs Taggart till he saw her.

The letter began, "My dear John," and went on to say that she and Peggy were coming to Arming for a fortnight. "When can we see you? Can you and Paul come to tea on Saturday?"

It was years since he had seen Mrs Taggart; and before that years again. Years seemed to come and go very quickly. Suppose you heard nothing of a person for seven years, and then heard again. It would make the seven years very short.

"A blush suffused his virgin cheek."

John handed the letter to Paul. "It's from Mrs Taggart. D'you remember we saw her one day on the front? And O'Farrell from my kid school."

"Little Johnny's little kindergarten."

"I minds it," Paul said. "She gave us a superb tea. Great woman." He read the letter.

"What about it? Can we go? Can you go?"

"Cannot. Got to be at the Tec. from five to seven on Saturdays. It's a scourge, but there it is."

"Oh. This is somewhat awk. I'm blasted if I want to go by myself."

"You'll have to."

"She asked you too, though."

"Couldn't you have her here?" the Cherub suggested. "If moral support's wanted."

"Oh. Moral support is. But there's Peggy O'Farrell."

"Well, can't Peggy O'Farrell come too?"

"Ralph, what in the name of holy thoulth art thou propothing?"

This was ultimately decided on. Mrs Grant was delighted, the Cherub (John thought) interested; Christopher was seriously disconcerted, and made frantic efforts to go out to tea. John wrote a laborious letter; Mrs Taggart and Peggy would be very pleased to come on Sunday about four.

The only person who was really bored was Paul. And that was only at missing the "Majestic" tea.

§

It is agitating having people to tea. John had scarcely spent two consecutive minutes in his life studying the problem of clothes; and now suddenly, like a ghoul, it arose. In one instant he hated all his ties. The respectable ones were hideous, and the decent-coloured ones were not respectable; he almost made up his mind to bag a brown one of Paul's to wear with his dark brown things.

Paul was critical.

"D'y you like lavender—or grey and lavender? . . . Not with your phiz—not with brown anyway. Blue's better than grey. Got a blue? And why don't you wear the breeks of your other things? Gives a lounge-suit effect. . . . Yes, I know. But 'tis Sunday. . . . What about a visit to the barber to-morrow? . . . I guess I'll do now if I damp the brush and brush like hell. What a scourge a wig is. Would I was bald. . . . Johnny, I can't get a parting. It won't get. I'm damned if I won't have Anzora cream. . . . And I'm

damned if I will. Hell take it, I was barbered only last Monday."

It was a very nervous moment just when the door bell rang. It gave you sinkings in the colonial regions. . . . But there was no need ever to be nervous with Mrs Taggart. She was a woman of understanding. With beautiful tact she took the Cherub for granted when he appeared, very sage in a green silk tie, until Mrs Grant saw him and did the introducing. Then there was Snark. Snark hadn't found anybody to go out to tea with, so he had to stay in, which was not likely to improve his temper. John was apprehensive about Snark.

But he need not have been. Snark was as gentle as a lamb. He talked to Mrs Taggart. He actually held forth, on chemistry, and surgery, and Glasgow University, and several other subjects; and she listened and appeared to be interested. She was a wonderful woman; but even John had thought it wouldn't pay to be wonderful with the Snark. It was a day of triumph.

After tea she talked to Paul. John thought she liked Paul. She talked to him as if she did.

Peggy didn't talk much. But then she never did. And she seemed quite pleased with life, and the Cherub seemed quite pleased with life too. It was a successful tea-party.

When they were going, Mrs Taggart spoke to John at the door. She said, "Come to tea to-morrow and have a talk."

§

John took steps to go to tea with Mrs Taggart. He managed it. When you are a day boy it is not difficult. And he went fixed in a never-faltering resolution.

It was the first time they had ever talked properly. She reminded him of this. She said:

"Do you remember when you were a little boy, and I asked you to come over and have tea with me and you never came? And then I saw you at your prep. school and I never got a chance to speak to you then. And then I saw you on the Parade here, and never got a chance to speak to you *then*. All these years, and never a chance of a proper talk."

John remembered all these interesting occasions perfectly.

"It is funny how we go on bumping into each other, isn't it, John Menzies? And you make friends with my nephew and go and stay at Glenlogie, and I hear of you that way too."

She stopped to have a cigarette; she offered one to John, but it is not done. As he lit up for her, the way was open for his never-faltering resolution. She had opened it.

He said, "You knew my uncles, too, didn't you?"

"Very well. Oh, very well. I knew all the Menzies boys very well. We lived near Perth—you know Glenlogie, of course—and we used to spend a great deal of our time at Mordenstair, and the boys used to come over and fish. I knew your mother too, but not well. But I knew the younger Menzies boys very well indeed. We all did."

Then it was John's chance. He said, "Did you know Uncle *Mush*?"

She looked at him. She said, "*You* didn't."

There was no reason why he should have felt awkward. He said, "No, I know, but I know—about him." And then he wished he had not said that, because he wanted Mrs Taggart to tell him about him.

She went on, "Robbie and Ludovic and Mush. We knew them all. Mush was the one I knew best of all. He was much younger than I was, of course—he was Rob's friend. Rob is my youngest brother. I remember so well how we used to take our lunch out and go fishing up the glens. He would be about your age—no, older, about sixteen or seventeen—it was when he was at Dunrobin, before he went to Oxford. I remember once—"

She stopped, and lit again. Then she seemed to be thinking, because she did not go on.

John waited. But still she did not go on; so he asked a question.

"Is Paul like him?"

It was the kind of question you can only ask very directly. He was afraid she would not say anything.

But she answered. She said, "Very like him. Very like him indeed."

And John knew for certain. He had to go on talking for fear she would stop, and speak about something else.

He said, "How funny."

And she said, "How do you know these things? You know some peculiar things, John Menzies."

He said, "I saw a photograph. At Glenlogie."

She seemed to understand, for she did not ask any questions. But she went on talking, which was what John wanted her to do.

"Yes, he's—— I saw it. I saw it the first time we met you on the Parade. It's like—it's like putting the clock back twenty years. Yesterday, for instance, when he was talking to me, he reminded me of a day—I can still see him—Mush, I mean—standing on a rock in midstream, and me slipping in, and he pretending to leave me, and hauling me out just in time. You never

knew where to have Mush. Then I married and went out to India, and I never saw him again."

John said nothing. She went on.

"He died in the East, you know. He died . . . he was drowned. . . . It was a terrible thing. . . . And now to see this boy—with all his ways—the look he suddenly gives you, and then looks away with that funny expression. Mush had just that. And the same voice—that quick voice. And his hair, of course. And his eyes. He has his eyes, light with dark shadows——"

She stopped again. Perhaps she remembered that one does not talk like this to youths of a tender age.

Only she *had* talked.

XXIII

LIFE was gloomy and yet intriguing.

It was full of gloom, because Heap was in a bad temper. Heap had spoken out—plain language from truthful James. He had called John the greatest failure of his teaching career—which is wounding to the intellectual pride.

This was because John didn't practise.

John knew he didn't practise. It was because he was busy writing just then, and you cannot write things and play at the same time. Later on he would not be writing, and then he would play. James Heap would not see this. He thought if you learnt music you ought to practise. He said that John ought to be playing services by now.

It was logical.

John was a failure, somehow. But one is. One does a thing and likes it, and then loses interest; and presently the interest comes back.

He could not tell Heap this. He could not tell him that he was bored with music, but he would not be bored. He could not tell Mummy that either. It was awkward about Mummy because he had been keen to begin.

People think that if you are keen you are always keen.

He had a bad half-term's report too. It was maths chiefly. Maths kept John awake at night. Sometimes the Snark would explain, and half-way through the ex-

planation John would begin not to see. And this was frightful, because you couldn't interrupt the Snark.

His head was in a haze. And at the same time things were jolly because there were books and the Cherub and de Medewe and Paul.

And Paul was like Uncle Mush. It made John feel young and happy inside to remember Mordenstair, with the moor and the green ride and the bathing-pool and Uncle Mush and Paul. It was his secret.

Nobody would ever know. It was the kind of foolish thing you do not tell. The most important things are also the foolish ones. You find this out.

Meanwhile there was maths. And de Medewe was being curiously beastly about setting prep., which you were expected to tackle with the three other lads there, all making a noise.

On one particular evening it was almost the limit. But John didn't intend it should be quite so; it hadn't got to be anyway, because de Medewe was getting restive. So he made a sporting effort, spurred on by the fact that the big boys were both groaning over higher algebra and statics. It was clearly John's business to weigh in and get finished first.

At the end of an hour he was still working, trying to understand the beastly new rule, and wasting sheets of paper.

"Look at that," the Cherub said to Christopher. Higher algebra was in abeyance for the moment while Paul and the Cherub practised that rather interesting trick in which you take the Queen of Hearts and slam her down with two other cards so dexterously that your opponent can never mark the right one. The Cherub was very fine at this, and Paul was improving. Chris-

topher had not joined the childish sport, but was doing statics and singing his favourite song.

Ding dong, ding dong, we gallop along.

"'Tis a thweet thight," he observed, pausing for a moment with his pen in the air.

"Observe higher thought in an unfavourable atmosphere," the Cherub went on, like a showman.

"Jonathan, don't be a funny ass, and come along down out of it."

"Can't," John replied, driving a furious pencil. "I'm busy."

"Oh, thith is not allowed—thith ith what, in Rosicrucian parlance, one would term tox." Tox is, of course, a frightful thing. "Ralph, thy thtrong right arm is indicated."

There was then a rag. John liked rags with the lads, only not then. He wanted to finish the prep., and as soon as they let him go he returned to the sheets of paper and Todhunter. This was considered as lacking in humour, and they were devising other means for driving humour into a person who does not want it, when a diversion appeared in the shape of a thunderstorm with some quite effective lightning. John watched it for a minute, and then went on with the prep. The rest repaired to the front door step, and he could hear the squeaking of his pencil for the first time.

When it was not thundering it was very still.

As he sat huddled over the table biting his pencil, the stillness suddenly became queer. Something moved in his vision—as if his equilibrium had swung, somehow, and made the balance different. And then something happened which he remembered happening when he was a little boy. Only he could not make out what

it was. It was like the ticking of a clock and the swinging of a pendulum, and yet it was neither sound nor sight. And it ticked and swung, slower and slower, till it became maddening, till he felt that a shade more would make him unable to stand it at all. A little slower, and it must stop. . . . It did stop. He was isolated. He was somewhere—only it was not “where” because it was not Space. There was no “where” or “when” in it. It was out of all these things.

This only lasted a moment by his watch. Then they banged a door, and the balance righted itself (in the same way as when you stop squinting), and he was only sitting at the dining-room table. Nothing had happened. Only it was queer to think that hardly thirty seconds had passed and yet he had been somewhere. Only it was not. . . . It seemed to make time not matter, somehow.

He decided to change the painful subject, and left the dining-room, slamming the door because he wanted to make a noise. The others were on the front steps. He had followed them out; or so they would think.

“Hullo, Johnny. It thunders, it lightens, the waters o’erflow.”

“Yea, there will indeed be an o’erflow of thpouts if this downpour continueth. It ill betheemeth thee to make a merry jest thereof.”

“How’s the toxey swat?” the Cherub inquired tripping John up by a dexterous turn of his foot round John’s shin.

“I’m delivering the goods. Ow! that was a good one. I say, are there any ghosts in the dining-room, d’you know?”

“Yes, three. Snark’s grandmother behind the book-

case, a very mouldy ghost, and my two aunts up the chimney. Seen 'em?"

"Some of 'em."

"Ralph, calleth thou in quethtion the honour of mine ancient grandam?"

They came back after that, which was what John had meant them to do. He wanted to finish his preparation, and yet he did not want to finish it alone. He was afraid of the odd no-feeling.

But it did not return. It couldn't. They cleared the table, at Christopher's suggestion (John was shoved into an armchair to work on his knee), and spent an immense amount of time constructing that attractive kind of card house in which each card leans zigzag against the next one, and you knock the whole thing down by a judicious touch, like firing a train. The only drawback is that if you laugh at the critical moment you blow the whole thing over. Paul did this several times.

John finished his prep. in spite of the fact that the others were all walking round the table and falling over his feet. Then he built a card house of sixteen storeys, and went to bed.

§

There were not many singing evenings as a rule during the summer term. It was just luck that Heap should decree one just then. Most of the choir thought it too hot to shout.

But the hall was cool with the parquet floor and the windows open. There were roses in bowls. John liked it. And Mrs Taggart and Peggy were there; Paul and the Cherub saw to that.

The parqueted floor shone, and the boys passed to

and fro in their white collars and black suits, as they had passed so many times before—as they had passed on John's first singing evening long ago. Only everybody was a size larger and several people were singing alto; and the Cherub was singing tenor, and John wasn't singing anything at all.

He was a visitor. But he enjoyed it. It was jolly sitting with Mrs Taggart and Peggy, with Ralph and Paul and Scottie and Eden (Eden was alto too) like meteors coming and going. Once James Heap came up and said things in the Heap manner. And Gilly came. John introduced Gilly to Mrs Taggart.

It is decent to have friends and to introduce them to other friends. Especially Mrs Taggart, for she was amused. She talked to Paul and John, and the Cherub talked to Peggy.

And the choir sang *Come away, Death*, and *On a Time the amorous Silvy*, and other perfectly nice things.

Paul sang alto. It was on that evening that John first realised what a jolly-looking chap Paul was. You do not see chaps as they are, as a rule; only just as chaps. But suddenly when Paul was standing in the middle of the room holding Mrs Taggart's coffee-cup and laughing, he saw him. Mrs Taggart saw him like that, and she had seen Uncle Mush like that. It was ripping, somehow. It was like pictures and statues.

They got separated at the end, for the Cherub was seeing Mrs Taggart and Peggy into the taxi, and John lost him and Paul too. He had to race after them down the street in the darkness; as he ran he could hear the calling and talk behind him, and feel the lights of the choir school blazing out into the night. They separated as he came up behind them, Paul saying, "Do I see my Johnny?"—and he took an arm of each, and they all

walked down the street together keeping step. They were nearly the same height now, because Paul was almost as tall as the Cherub, and John was as tall as Paul.

John wanted to walk on in the darkness—to walk on and on, near St George's—he could feel the slight roughness of Paul's coat against his wrist. They did not say anything—it was natural, it was themselves, walking in the dark in silence—knowing nothing about each other. That was it. Nobody knew anything. They were near each other, and yet they were all thinking strange things. The Cherub thinking about Peggy, thoughts John did not know—John thinking—he knew the feeling which was neither Space nor Time, but they did not know it—Paul thinking unknown thoughts. Paul was the nearest person, and yet he was the farthest too. Everyone millions of miles away from the rest and not realising it—atoms of dust blowing about the earth *—from far, from eve and morning and you twelvewinded sky. . . .* He could write about walking in the dark because other people must have felt the same thing. They would know if he wrote it—that was the only point of writing, to let other people know that you know. Not plots. Plots do not matter. They do not really happen. The things that everyone feels and nobody writes—those are the things that matter. Nobody has ever written of the feeling you have on a dark night walking by a church—the feeling that there will be something after all when you are dead. It only comes for a second, because all feeling is like that, not lasting. You feel nothing, only trying to believe that you do; and then suddenly it does come, but only for an instant. Books always try to make out that you can feel all the time.

At the gate the long silence was broken. It was Paul who broke it. He said,

"Oh, my damnable collar."

Then they rushed in shrieking from the security of darkness to the security of light.

§

"Well, have you hacked it into Jonathan's head after all that?"

The Cherub asked this at supper one evening.

"I have not penetrated the lad's thkull. Having done all that man can do, I retire."

"What is it that John doesn't understand?"

"Mother, you wouldn't thee if I explained till Doom."

"It's only a catch, Mrs Grant," the more mannerly Cherub hastened to add. "A hoary old catch about a man immersing a stick in water and standing in the sea."

"And he can't get drowned, becos however many terms we take, we are always short, O Israel, of four inches by an amount equal to the last term taken. Superb. Mathematicus the child wonder."

"Never mind, John," Mrs Grant said consolingly. "I could never do sums myself when I was at school."

This was a little too much. Christopher saw it too.

"I don't know whether thath much compliment to John. You never got beyond divithion of money in any cathe."

"And Jonathan *has* started fractions—the little lad-die! O Israel—that's my shin."

"I fail to see," the Cherub remarked, cutting bread, "how you can *not* see a thing when you've once seen it. You did see this bl"—the Cherub remembered Mrs

Grant just in time—"this asinine thing once because I shoved it into your skull myself."

"I dare say you do fail to see, but I don't. That's exactly what I *do* do. I think of a thing for hours on end, like that blasted old catch P. was burbling about t'other day, about a ship going out and losing a day, and the place where the change comes and all that muck. I saw that when I thought it out long enough, and if I thought it out again, I'd see it again. And the same with this four-inch fellow. But I don't see it unless I think it all out each time I want to think of it."

"John, thy thpeech ith ath frazzled as thy grey matter. . . . Amid cheers and groans Sir Israel Men-zies sat down. . . . Sir O. Israel. . . . Pull yourselves together, boys . . . Well, drop the four-inch mark; drop all reference to the four-inch mark. . . ."

For some reason or other John noticed this conversation all the time it was going on; not because it was particularly interesting, but because he wanted to remember how people did talk in real life. And they talked like that, and not like boys in books. Boys in books either talk like rather sloppy girls, or else with such a wealth of slang and scintillating brilliancy that it would take you a lifetime thinking of the things. And you didn't want to have to think of the things. It was what people really did say.

He was meditating rather deeply on these things. De Medewe might have been drawn into discussion but he and Paul went round together, and there were other things to talk about.

There was always plenty to talk to de Medewe about.

"Hullo, Apostolic Church. What about that Masefield?"

"Top-hole." And it *was*, too; it was *Poems and*

Ballads. ‘I’ll have another one of him, de Medewe—anything as long as it’s sea. Oh, and I want some reviews.’

“There’s *The Bookman*—washy but respectable.”

“Why do you have *The Bookman*? Bunkish magazine.” They investigated the books and magazines scattered on de Medewe’s table. “Rupert Brooke. Good man. *The Near East*. I’m fed up with the *Near East*. Hasn’t some bunkhead been shooting some other bunkhead at Sarawak? No, not Sarawak. *Farthest South*. *Farthest South*, and *Nearest East*. I’ll take *Farthest South*. *The Times*. *The New Statesman*. I believe in the holy catholic collection——”

“I am not attending to you. I am correcting the singularly vile papers of your geometry set.”

“Oh, have you got mine? Rather intriguing.” John wandered off to the book-shelf, while Paul murmured the headlines of *The Times*, sprawling over the table. “Officer’s Tragic Plea. Divorce Division. Meeting of the Public Schools Association. Other Courts. Former Clergyman——”

“Apostolic Paul, there’s some correspondence on your favourite subject in *The Literary Supplement*. Here you are. ‘Case of Edwin Drood.’ I saved them for you. There are four or five letters from people who all think different things about Tartar, or Helena or Grewgious. You’re a Tartarite, I believe. Well, you read——”

“Oh, are there, sir? Right-o.”

John read Swinburne while de Medewe and Paul talked about Datchery. In the quiet and falling twilight of the room he read—

By the waters of Babylon we stood up and sang,
Remembering thee.

This did not fit in with the previous conversation, because things do not. It is one of the weak points of real life. He was thinking about this as he walked home; they did not talk much.

On the front doorstep the Cherub was talking to Peggy. This was surprising. But she and Mrs Taggart had walked round after supper to see the boys. . . . John and Paul had been rather amused about the Cherub. You could make him blush. This had never been possible before.

They talked for a few minutes, and then John and Paul went in. The others did not follow. John supposed the Cherub really liked standing on the doorstep and talking to Peggy. He wondered what there was to say. Peggy was nice, but she did not help conversation much.

He tried to make up an imaginary conversation, but it did not get very far. You know that it won't; you know that there is something else. . . . Things are difficult: you cannot write a story about four-inch marks, Edwin Drood, Songs before Sunrise, and the Cherub talking to Peggy. If it had been a book, they would have fitted in.

Real life does not fit in.

John had come to that conclusion.

§

He could not go to sleep that night.

It was not much good getting into bed, because you cannot think lying down; it is easier if you lean out of the window. But it is not easy when you do not know what you are going to think of.

It is no good bothering about religion. That hymn

he had once heard them singing at the Catholic Church—

O queen of heaven, Star of the sea,
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me.

That has nothing to do with religion. Anyone can say it—

Pray for the wanderer, pray for me.

It is rhythmic, like "By the waters of Babylon we stood up and sang." Everyone together. "We stood up and sang." That was in de Medewe's room, and *Une Vie* had been in de Medewe's room too. And Dolores. "O splendid and sterile Dolores." Dolores was the same as the women you had seen in the streets. All the good and bad things are mixed up till you do not know which is which.

There is no such thing as goodness.

Father Angus. . . .

Miéville might go to the church and say, "Pray for the wanderer, pray for me." Walking down from football with his hand on your shoulder—buying seven-pound pots of jam with his cheery smile that showed he did not care. The Cherub hated Miéville. He had to, because he was the other sort.

There was nobody who could help. De Medewe was out of it somehow; he would not understand about *Une Vie*. And the Cherub would not understand—even the Cherub, the beloved person. . . . He would understand less than de Medewe, because he was too near to see. Mummy did not understand anything at all. Nor Mrs Grant. Mrs Taggart would up to a certain point, but the moment would come when she would be surprised. Ilay would be knowing. They were all the same; they would just spoil it.

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Paul would not. Paul never had spoilt things. He never could. Whatever you said to him, whatever awful thing, rotten mouldering thing, you could be sure he would be ordinary about it. It was like water clear and bright and cool—like the blue lake in *C'est l'heure de repos, l'heure délicieuse!* P. D. would have been ordinary even about that woman, or Miéville, or *Une Vie*. It made them less awful.

He knew Paul would be like that, but he would never find out, because one does not. One cannot talk straight out. And that is loathsome. . . . He wanted to shout things out, with the older chaps there too, yell them out, as you yell scores at cricket. If you shout, awful things will not be awful.

P. D. would shout. He was like Uncle Mush. He would not mind.

XXIV.

THE term went on with the same old cricket. It was like Acharn, only heftier. You had to practise for hours at the nets. Also you had to do an unnecessary amount of corps work, on account of something called Certificate A. Certificate A was a fag. The Cherub and Christopher were both Corps Commanders, and John always thanked God when he was not in Christopher's squad. You laughed when you heard Snark trying not to lisp, and then he took it out of you afterwards.

It was not a bad term on the whole. There were plenty of outlets; borrowing books from de Medewe, biking with Paul, going down to play cricket with the choir school, which he and Paul occasionally did. He went to see Gilly a good deal too. He liked Gilly; Gilly liked P. D.

James Heap was inclined to be fractious, but John learnt the Giant Fugue in such a classical manner that he had to relent. The Giant Fugue is an old man walking upstairs. Then he did the E Flat Major Sonata; Paul used to come and watch him practise and pull out stops.

He did not write anything all July. It seemed uncertain whether he could; he was going to think it out in the holidays.

The holidays would be exciting. For he was going on a walking tour, a proper walking tour with Christopher

and the Cherub. It was their summer amusement. Last year it had been the New Forest, and this year it was going to be Somersetshire. John would go home for a week, and join them at Minehead.

He was bucked at the thought. It was decent of them to ask him, because he was fifteen and they were both seventeen. Christopher was nearly eighteen. But it did not seem to matter. He was not two years younger now when they talked.

The only regretful thing was that Paul could not come too. But P. D. had to go and see Aunt Mary; he could not get out of that. John disliked Aunt Mary. And then he was going to stay with Bony, and then with Squish. The Technical School had short holidays too. At Christmas he was going into the Bank, and then there would only be a fortnight a year.

Banks give rotten holidays.

You buy a knapsack for a walking tour. John wrote for the money, and got the things at Arming under the Cherub's eye—a collapsible drinking-cup and nails in your boots. Snark had an Etna stove.

In the beginning of July several chaps got influenza. Then every day more chaps went getting influenza; it was a special sort that attacked you in the gastric regions. It did not attack John in the gastric or indeed any other regions. And it did not attack Snark or the Cherub either; the pain that Snark had one night was not that at all. But so many chaps did get attacked that college shut up on the 17th of July.

The Cherub and John went home. The walking tour was fixed for the end of the month, so they kept to that, because Snark was adamant and would never change a date. It was not particularly nice weather either.

John was glad to break up in a way, for work is

always a fag. But he couldn't pretend that he liked Lyncombe and Mummy better than Arming and P. D.

§

Mummy met him and kissed him and said, "Darling, how big you've grown." People often say this; they are really surprised to find you a different size, not having grown themselves for some time.

John *had* grown. He knew it by his clothes.

Mummy then said, "Esmé was in. You are to go round and see her—I said you would."

"Same old tennis, I suppose."

"No, there's going to be a dance, or something. She'll tell you all about it."

"A dance! Me at a dance!"

He expected Mummy would improve the occasion, but she did not say, "Now, John, do be nice, darling, and go, won't you?" She had been much less improving lately.

He went round to the Bushells to see what it was all about. They flew to meet him. They came flying downstairs.

"John! Here's John. John, have you heard? You're coming to a dance."

"Oh, *am* I?"

Joy circled round him like a dragon-fly.

"Oh, dear John, do say you will. Look here. It's like this. All the girls have got to take partners. The Conquests are coming with us, Bobby and Gwyn, that makes two and Osmond, and then we want you. It makes six."

"But where *is* the dance?"

"You and Osmond and Esmé and I and the Conquests."

"But where *is* the beastly thing?"

"On the 23rd. At the Tallentires."

It was astonishing how those Tallentires were always turning up.

He said, "But we don't know the Tallentires."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. You can always take men anywhere. And you're so beautifully big, John dear. You look quite seventeen."

John said, "I always do." He did not mean it quite like that, but it is difficult to express yourself suddenly.

Esmé went on, "And it'll be so topping for sitting out. All along the Vale, and up the Combe. There'll be Chinese lanterns all down the garden, I expect. There were before."

John had not known before that the Tallentires lived in the Vale. It was amusing to see Joy preening herself. Girls are like that. He said:

"I thought you couldn't do with the Tallentires at any price."

This was meant to reproach her, but she was not reproached at all. She said, "Ah, but this is a *dance*."

They taught John to dance. It was an appalling sweat, and once or twice he nearly gave it up altogether and told them he couldn't be bothered to go. But they were most flattering, and said, "You're so beautiful and *big*." Of course, he was not particularly big, really; not as big as a man.

He danced with Joy most of the time. After a bit he got on all right, only he had to give his whole attention to it.

Osmond came to practise too, but he was not so satisfactory, because Esmé was taller. And Bobby Conquest

was like a bean-pole. He had to dance with Esmé because Gwyn was his sister, and you can't expect brothers to dance with sisters.

It was a real dance. For real dances you wear dress suits; and this is terrible. But John had to, because he was too big to disguise himself. Bobby Conquest had one too, with pearl studs.

Mummy hovered over the dressing. His hair was the worst part. It was singularly intractable.

"You look awfully nice, darling. Did you use the hair cream?"

He brushed her aside. He was stern, because he felt a fool. He ate his dinner feeling a fool; the silver and glass shone in the light on the oak table. Cleaned by Laura, it glittered in the way it does when you are going to a dance. Laura was the new servant. She cleaned silver better than Mrs Kethro had done.

The Conquests called for him. Bobby's hair was as sleek as the hair of an officer in the Guards. They stood in the hall talking, Gwyn with her white coat and white fluffie of fur.

John put on his overcoat. He did not feel at all like gaiety; his face was set, so that it was an effort to talk and to smile. If some angel had passed through the hall and told him that he could spend the evening slacking in an armchair with *Father Brown*, he would have been more relieved than he had ever been before. But no angel came; and he knew his hair was wrong.

Joy said, "I like your hair." But Joy was flattering, because she was pleased at making him come to the dance. He was her property.

They walked to Marymount by the River Lyn. Marymount was the name of the Tallentires' house. It is a nice name. The mount of Mary, looking out to sea.

Stella maris—Star of the Sea. There was a side gate leading steeply up to the house from the river bank, and they went that way, Joy hanging on to John's arm.

Nothing was quite as it had ever been before. There are times that are different.

Out on the gravel there was the bustle of motors and people flitting quickly into the house from the step of the car. The steep path led into the drive, and they joined all the rest flitting quickly in.

Then it was horrible—cloak-rooms, and men with sleek hair, like Bobby's. All the men had sleek hair. They stood in little groups talking in *blasé* voices on the shining floor of the dancing-room. Girls were talking too, all round. "My dear, it was awful. My dear, I simply can't tell you! Let me do it up, Mary." There were crowds of girls with white arms, all alike.

Miss Tallentyre was not alike. She spoke to John as Esmé was taking him up to Lady Tallentyre to be introduced. It was in the crowd; people booking dances and laughing. She had a pink band in her hair, and she said over her shoulder, "Hullo, Dorian Gray."

At first John thought she was mistaking him for someone else, and he nearly said "I'm not." Afterwards he was glad he had not said this, for he had an idea that Dorian Gray came in a book. "The Victim of Dorian Gray," or something like that. It was not Kipling or Stevenson.

Lady Tallentyre shook hands and said, "Very glad to see you." She was not really glad at all, except to think that there was another male; this is all hostesses care about. But that was not all, for just as he was turning away she seemed to know his name suddenly, and added, "Young Menzies, aren't you? Tell your mother I'm coming to call."

John said, "I will, thank you."

"She'll remember me," said Lady Tallentyre. "Ask her if she remembers Shropshire. Captain Quinton at last! Motored down, have you?"

John drifted away, thinking about Shropshire, and met Miss Tallentyre again, looming taller than he.

She said, "Am I going to dance with you?"

There is only one reply you can make to this.

Other girls came up, brought by Joy and Esmé. John booked unknown names. He remembered to ask Joy for two dances; girls like to be asked for two dances. He found this out.

He danced with Esmé and Gwenydd and Joy and Brenda and Doris and Peggy and Royde. Royde was Royde Quinton, whose father had motored down. He had two with her—*Tales of Hoffmann* and another one. After Royde's second dance there was a scribble on his card, V. T.

V. T. was Vi Tallentyre.

The room was very full and the music was very loud. It was the middle of things when you have forgotten the beginning of the dance, and there does not seem to be any end. The band crashed *Samson—Samson*—and John's forehead was hot and his mouth dry. He could dance well enough for Esmé and Royde, but he could not dance well enough for Vi Tallentyre.

It would have been dreadful if she had said so, but she had the grace not to do that. As they passed the door she slipped his arm.

"Let's go out. It's hot enough to roast a devil."

So they went out on to the crunching gravel.

She whistled to herself. John did not know what to say to her. She knew that he did not know; she knew too much. Naturally enough, she did not help him.

You could not imagine Vi Tallentyre helping you in a difficult situation. She was teasing him; because she knew about his dancing, and that he was afraid she would speak about it.

They strolled to the grass, John with his hands in his pockets and blankness in his brain. Then she put her hand on his arm.

"Down to the river by the path on your left—young chatterbox."

And still he did not know what to say. If he had said, "I am not a chatterbox," she would have been able to deal with him. Whatever he said she would answer and shut up and finish. So he said nothing, and they went down the sloping path, and she whistled *Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix*, which the band had played when he danced so badly. He would have liked to dance well to that tune.

They reached the Lyn path, and were blown upon by the river airs. It was the sort of night when you cannot walk by the river without wanting something to happen; only you do not know what. But John found himself thinking of the Lyn ages ago, and Northcott and Dodo Ferrers. He had not liked the river then; he had not wanted to walk by it. Unexpected things come from the cool river airs.

They stopped by the bridge. She spoke at last, carelessly.

"Rickety old bridge. It was knocked down once. We had it built up."

John said, "Did you?" Then Lady Tallentyre's message came to the front of his mind again; something he wanted to know. He asked, "Did you ever live in Shropshire?"

She did not answer. He stepped on to the rickety

old bridge, and leant with an elbow over each rail, to see if it would sway.

"Did you?"

It was a rickety bridge. She stood facing him on the bank, looking at him. And suddenly she said,

"Oh, you. Oh, you babe."

Then she took his hands. She caught them and forced him to stand up and listen to her speaking.

"Babe. You devilish babe. Why do I waste my time on you? Think I haven't men after me? Think I can't have who I like? And yet I waste my time on you."

John felt himself shaking, and tried to stop it. He was determined that she should not feel it; he bit the inside of his under lip with his teeth.

It was a bad moment. But the next was worse.

She said, "Come here. You are to come here," And she pulled him to her till he was close, and kissed his mouth.

Then quite suddenly she was gone. She had turned and fled up the steep path to Marymount, and he was alone on the bridge.

For some time he stood without moving. If he moved his blood began running fast, and then he was hot. It was hot anyway—burning. He wanted to take off all the silly evening clothes, and kneel by the river and cool his face and his hands.

If he thought of it hard, it could not have happened; but he did not think of it. He did not even think clearly that he could ever go back to Marymount again, though he knew it. He stood on the bridge saying silly pointless things to himself, rhymes that he knew. Once he laughed, because he remembered the limerick he and Snark had made up about the Cherub. When he laughed

the bridge rocked, and then he realised that he could not go back to Marymount.

The foolish part of it was that he did go back. He had to. You cannot leave your coat in the gentlemen's cloak-room; and then there were Eamé and Joy. He could not plunge into the darkness and flee through the night.

He missed two dances; he did not explain, and they thought he was sitting out. Girls rather like it when they think you are the sort of boy who sits out. . . . Perhaps Joy had been kissed when she sat out with Evan Dewe. But that was different. You expected it. You did not expect the thing that had happened. Nobody would think it possible; nobody would think of it at all.

That is the only way, not to think of it at all. If you do, it is too awful to bear.

XXV

THEN it was the great walking tour.

Like many mothers, Mummy did not realise that it was a walking tour till he was on the point of starting. Then she said, "A *walking* tour, darling? Isn't that rather a silly idea? They say the Somersetshire roads are so bad, too."

"Well, it's a walking tour. I can't suddenly back out."

"No; but won't they walk too fast?"

This was merely silly, and John stopped it. . . . He let her get some boracic powder to shake into his socks.

"Don't sleep out if it's wet, dearest, will you?"

"I've got a mackintosh sheet."

"Yes; but do promise me. John dear, do promise me." And so it went on.

Half-way to Minehead he remembered that he had never given Lady Tallentyre's message. It was not quite on purpose; only that he didn't want to be reminded of any of them. He sent Mummy a picture post card to prepare her. It was a picture of Exmoor, with ponies; like the ponies he and Paul had seen.

At Minehead there were Christopher and the Cherub. Also pots, pans, spirit lamps and cubes of Bovril. The Cherub had strikingly little, and Christopher strikingly much. But it is not true that you can walk through England with a spare pair of socks and a tooth-brush. On the contrary, it is surprising to find what a number

of things you want—shaving soap and scissors and string and matches and cigarettes. Christopher had intended to bring a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salt, but on the Cherub's suggestion compromised with pills. He showed these to John.

John said, "We can't light pills or smoke pills or wash with pills." The Cherub agreed; but Christopher said that you never know. You might wake up one morning on the Glastonbury Hills feeling not quite the thing. In that case you would take a pill.

John bought two packs of playing cards in Minehead. It was rather a brilliant idea, and he stuffed one into each trouser pocket. Then he could not get the matches in. But you cannot have everything. At the last minute Christopher thought of pins.

They slept at Minehead, at the "Bull and Horn." All the windows were loose in their sockets, and Christopher got up to borrow John's scissors in the middle of the night. John lent him a pack of cards as well, which made the window perfectly satisfactory, and there was no need for Christopher to buy two wooden plugs in the morning.

The Cherub said, "We shan't be sleeping in a hostelry with dicky windows again."

But Christopher said, "One never knowth," and put the plugs in his pocket. Then the Cherub had to take the cigarettes.

They laughed about Christopher. John liked laughing with the Cherub. Then they started, with the pills and the pins and the window plugs, and two rolls of Brownie films.

On the first day they walked to Winston, and it rained, and they slept at the "Crown and Anchor." There were blackbeetles in the passages. The next day

Christopher had another flash of genius, and bought a tin of disinfectant—the kind that comes out of a sifter like sugar. The Cherub quite refused to take this, so Christopher gave him the Brownie films.

All this day they talked very exhaustively and instructively. It is surprising how many things there are to discuss. They talked ghosts from Dinniford to Combe Walter, a distance of over seven miles. There is a haunted Manor at Dinniford, but Christopher did not believe in ghosts; he had an explanation for every phenomenon brought forward by the Cherub and John, and this passed the time very pleasantly.

At Combe Walter they had sausages and bacon, and slept at Whispering Will. It was at Whispering Will that Christopher found a flea in his bed. The top of the sifter came off, and a good deal of the disinfectant was lost.

The next night they slept at Glastonbury. It was the first fine day. Christopher had a blister on his heel, so Ralph and John went out to the ruins, and then up to the Tor. There was a thin silvery moon.

It is beautiful on the Tor, alone at night, with sleeping England below. There was no sound at all, except a dog barking now and then from a farm far away. They did not talk much, but stood and watched the soundless sleeping fields. For some reason it all reminded John of *The Shropshire Lad*.

To-day the Roman and his trouble
Are ashes under Uricon.

Uricon reminds you of Glastonbury Tor. It is any place that will go on and on for ever, when the Romans are gone and you are gone.

There may be Romans buried on Glastonbury Tor.

Perhaps in fifteen hundred years, when John and the Cherub were gone, somebody would stand on the Tor and think of England all those years ago. It seems to come in cycles; people thinking of people.

He took Ralph's arm. They were not ashes under Uricon.

They went down to the inn and found Christopher doctoring his blister. He had been talking to the landlord, who said there was going to be another Balkan War.

Ralph said, "Blast the Balkans. Let's sleep out tomorrow." He was leaning out of the window looking at the Tor.

"We mutht buy a paper and thee these thingth."

But the next morning it was fine, and they were away early before the papers came in.

That was the first real outdoor day. They were on the hills, eating and reading and talking and sleeping; they slept in their blankets in a cup of the down with silent hills all round.

§

John found it difficult to go to sleep. The silence was too deep to be real. Perhaps silence is stupendous noise; you cannot be sure. . . . Ralph and Christopher rolled themselves up and lay motionless. John lay motionless too, but awake, on his back with his arms flung out. He had thrown off his blanket and lay as he was on the Glastonbury Hills.

His mind was like a chain, link after link dropping, each suggesting something else. People say you can trace thoughts back; Sherlock Holmes could do it, but real people would not think like that. If you begin to think you are thinking, you get self-conscious and silly,

and plan your thoughts out in ordered succession. . . . The hard ground made him think of sliding—if the world had no gravity he would be sliding off—he shut his eyes and felt himself falling, sliding into space. To the moon—suppose you slid to the moon and could not slide back. He might have to live in the moon, and never see Ralph or P. D. again. Paul was in Shropshire. Everybody had been there but John—the Murrays and the Tallentires and A. E. Housman and Paul. There is some mystery about Shropshire, and perhaps Hereford; something that is not in Warwick or Gloucester or any of the others. It is the same with countries—Persia is the mysterious country. To go to Persia—to Ispahan. . . . If you went to Ispahan they would laugh at you for being a Christian. Mohammed was a prophet like Christ. If you said you would not believe in Christ, no one could make you. Not even God could do it. You could stand up against God. If God was decent, like the Cherub, he would be amused at your puny power; he would say, “I admire his cheek,” and would not cast you into the nethermost hell. But there cannot be any God really; not the Father of Christ, who accepts the sacrifice. It does not fit in with what you know about the world and things. . . . This is blasphemy, to talk like this, Hell. Hell is hard to believe, as hard as God, because you cannot see where the border-line comes between good and bad. One is neither good nor bad. Paul was good; better than any other chap John knew, but even he was unthinkable in heaven. He would be bored with the worship, and want John very badly to talk holy slang with. But John would never go to heaven; if there is a heaven. Blasphemous thoughts keep you out, and other thoughts as well. Your thoughts are sometimes horrible, when you let

them be. . . . All this about heaven was nonsense really. It cannot be like that, even supposing God was no better than the Cherub. It would be grossly unfair.

What is true then? John thought, "Supposing I died now this very second on Glastonbury Hill—what would happen?" And he did not know. It is very important, and nobody knows. If he woke up Christopher and Ralph and asked them—they would not know what to say. Ralph might say "Purgatory," but you would not know if he really believed it. Purgatory is cleansing fires. But if it were cleansing fires, would it be *yourself*? It is not the sort of thing that you can imagine happening. And why should things change? You are still yourself, unless you are nowhere.

That is a bad thought. Knowing you are going to die, and the world getting farther and farther away—for ever. If John died then, that minute, he would see Ralph's head dark against the sky, and then blackness would blot it out, and as the blackness fell he would know that he would never see Ralph again. Everything gone and finished, all the things you had wanted to do. If it is going to be like that, what is the good of doing anything?

Your mind works double. He had found that out before. Even at the moment when he was thinking about Death, something in his mind was remembering a rhyme he had heard at school—a beastly rhyme. It was "cleansing fires" that made him think of it.

He sat up and shifted himself nearer to the Cherub, who was sleeping heavily and quietly. The night was clear, and John could see his face and his dark hair tossed untidily. His chin was thrust out, in the way you always thought of it when you saw him in your mind. He was far away. Nobody knew where he was,

or what he was thinking of. He would never know that John had imagined him like God. Your thoughts are better and worse than you can ever tell people. Ralph might talk to John about death, but he would never talk about Peggy, and John would never know whether he had kissed her on the doorstep in the dark. But Ralph knew. And he thought. He had known long ago the truth about Father Angus that you almost guessed. Ralph, the beloved person, on Glastonbury Tor. . . . He had done things for you. . . .

Thought is free. Someone had said that.

The words "beloved person," as they passed through your mind, made you think of somebody else. Uncle Mush. Uncle Mush, who was like Paul.

Ralph stirred and sighed, flung up his chin and settled down again. He did not wake. If he had opened his eyes he would have seen John sitting and watching him, and thinking of Shropshire and Father Angus, and Uncle Mush and Paul.

§

All the next day, and the day after, they stayed on the hills. Below them they saw villages, and once a party of soldiers out manoeuvring. Ralph said, "Going to the Balkan War," and he and Snark laughed over the corps and Certificate A.

They ate biscuits and heated Oxo on the spirit-lamp. They had tongue, too, and potted meat—plenty of food, and a book each, and the cards. They played poker, and cut-throat bridge was also possible, though Christopher was always difficult to play with. He was so slow, and he would whistle, which irritated the Cherub and generally ended in a discussion.

But except when Christopher was whistling, it was jolly. Being there with Ralph was jolly; laughing over things with him, or heating Oxo in the saucepan, or prospecting sleeping places, or talking together when Snark was singing or sulking. There was suddenly something between John and Ralph, the thing that does come sometimes between people who know each other very well, and makes them laugh and see jokes, and like to do things together. . . . They did not leave Christopher out, but it was just themselves.

At last it was necessary to drop on to the high-road and mix with men. One cannot skirt villages for ever. They came rather suddenly on Wells at a turn of the road, and Christopher put a new film in his camera. But when they got near, it was not beautiful to the eye, being full of motors and bicycles and soldiers and newspaper boys. The Cherub and Christopher were affronted. They said, "Those blasted manœuvres," and other expressions.

John said, "It can't be manœuvres. It's something. It's the Balkan War. Get a newspaper, Snark."

"The Balkan War in Somerset," Ralph said. He and John walked on, while Christopher disappeared into a newspaper shop. "The bloody Balkan War."

"Blast the bloody Balkans."

Then they heard Christopher calling behind.

"Snark shouteth. Snark hath the jimjams."

"It is war."

"Cherub, it is the bloody Balkan War. I love my love with a B, because he is—no, I hate him with a B—"

"I hate him with a B, because he is a bloody Balkan."

But Christopher was not laughing. He caught them up, flattening *The Daily Mail* against the wind.

"You fools, it is war. We're at war."

"We're at war," said the Cherub. "We're at war in Wells. Obviously."

John laughed. A car with two officers raced past, and at that moment he saw the headline of *The Daily Mail*. The odd part was that it was what Snark had said. "Cherub, it is war. England is at war. England is at war in Wells."

And Christopher said, "You fools. Look, you fools. We're at war with Germany. We're mobilised."

They stopped and looked over Christopher's shoulder. They read *The Daily Mail* together in Wells High Street, with cars and motor cycles flashing past, and a strong head wind blowing the paper away. And it was war. They had come down off the Glastonbury hills into England at war.

It is impossible suddenly to realise war. John could not do it. There never had been war; only the Boer War, which he could not remember, and that was so far away that it was not like a real war. But you can see it in your mind after a time—a plain and soldiers galloping, and guns being brought up behind the hill. The soldiers all wear solar topees, because it is impossible to think of war except in South Africa.

"Chritht, why can't the foolth leave *uth* out of it? Why drag *uth* in? Oh, ye godth, the needleth expenthe."

"The French'll mobilise and march into Belgium. Perhaps they've started. Great God, I hope they'll look alive."

"The French can march to any fool plathe they like. But to drag *uth* in——"

They walked down the High Street, and the big boys talked, while John went on thinking of bright sun

and flashing bayonets and horses; and unseen death coming from behind the hill. That is War. Presently they were at the station, with a crowd of people waiting for papers. There would be news, somebody said—news about the Belgian forts. Everyone was talking to everyone else, and discussing the number of weeks the war would last. A man with a black beard said three weeks. But an old man in an apron laughed at him.

"Three weeks! Three months, more likely."

Three months of war. You cannot imagine it.

"In three months we'll have the Kaiser in a noose."

"The Kaiser'll be the wrong side of the Rhine again in three months, eh, Bill?"

"We'll settle the Kaiser."

§

They slept in Wells. They could not go on, because there might be some more news about Liège. It was a confused evening, all talk and discussion and maps and plans; as John lay in bed he could hear the big boys talking through the partition, Ralph talking to Christopher, not to John; he did not want to talk to John any more. The nice jolly feeling was gone, because of the war. . . . John wanted someone to talk to himself. He wanted Paul, who was in Shropshire hearing about the war from the mysterious Shropshire people. Paul ought to have been there talking to John as Ralph talked to Christopher. You want someone, in a war.

Next day they went to Cheddar. And at Cheddar there was a recruiting meeting, with speeches by a J.P. and a Master of the Foxhounds. John and the Cherub went to it. The J. P. and the M.F.H. both said the

same thing. They wanted Men. The more men England got, the shorter the war would be. They would push back Germany the other side of the Rhine, as the soldier had said. Kitchener said so too. If the Men came forward, the world would be a better world by Christmas, and the Kaiser would be taken prisoner.

But if the Germans came to England. The J.P. was speaking here; he dropped his voice, and it sounded very dreadful indeed. When it came to "wives, sweethearts and daughters," he almost whispered. . . . John had never known the Germans were like that. They are fat, and drink beer, and wear spectacles, and sing in parts divinely; but when they go to war they behave like that. They behave like Attila and the Huns. . . . The room was very hot, and the men were very red and shiny. John was glad when it was over, and he and Ralph could walk back to the inn in the coolness, saying little.

But though Ralph did not say anything about it then, John knew the walking tour must come to an end. Nobody was really paying attention to it; they were wondering when the next papers would come in. It was in the afternoon that Ralph said to John,

"Snark and I've been talking it over. We think we'll have to go back and see what's happening."

John said, "To Arming?"

"Oh, just to see what the old corps is thinking about, and whether Certificate A is Certificate A-ing."

The Cherub spoke quite airily, just as if there was no war at all.

And the Germans were battering Liège. There was killing going on. Germans killing Belgians, and Belgians killing Germans. While John and the Cherub stood talking by a gate in Somersetshire, Belgian boys

and German boys were killing each other. It would be strange to see the first dead boy, but after a time you would be used to it.

And all the time you feel that these things cannot really happen, to real people. Real people are you and Ralph and Snark. You could not imagine yourself besieged in a town with people being killed—perhaps Ralph being killed. . . . It just does not happen.

Whether it happens or not, Christopher and the Cherub meant to go back to Arming and see about it.

§

That day John sent Mummy a wire to say "Coming home to-morrow."

There was really nothing else to be done. Snark and the Cherub would talk about nothing but the corps and the war and trains back to Arming. They had not told John anything definitely, but he gathered from scraps of conversation that they intended to catch an early train the next day. In any case, there was no more walking tour; it was just hanging round the station, waiting for the paper.

It was almost a relief to get away.

The Stapledore train was full of farmers and country women with parcels, talking about the war in the heat. He waited two hours at Stapledore and got an afternoon paper. Liège was holding out. It was strange to think of Liège, full of farmers and country women, perhaps, not unlike the Devonshire people—only Flemish—strange to think of guns and death over there, as the Lyncombe train lolloped and rocked in its loopy curve around the green fields. There are most likely

staggering little trains in Belgium too. Only no trains ran to Liège.

Lyncombe station was full of people, waiting for the papers that came by the afternoon train. The first face John saw was that belonging to Mr Langtry, the Vicar. He was nothing to John or John to him; and yet he smiled, showing shining teeth in his red face.

More than this, he spoke. He had come to meet John, not the afternoon papers. It was incredible.

"Young Menzies, I believe? I thought you might come by this train. Yes."

John walked out of the station with the Vicar. Then he remembered his box and had to go back again. When it was finally settled, the Vicar proceeded. He said, "Yes, I thought you'd be here. You sent a telegram."

"I sent a telegram," John said. He could not follow the Vicar. Most vicars are driving at something.

"Your telegram came. Your telegram came. Yes."

John said, "Yes." Then he wanted to laugh suddenly. It is a dreadful feeling, but he suppressed it, and the Vicar went driving on.

"It was lucky your telegram came, so that we knew you were coming back to-day. Exactly. The maid brought it down. I knew before, of course. Yes, I knew before. She was in great trouble, poor girl."

John began saying, "What is it? I don't know what it is!" But the Vicar anticipated these questions, and went on talking through them.

"Yes, I thought, and my wife thought, that it was best I should come up to the station. You will want to know. Yes. My boy, it is your mother. Your mother is not well."

Something in the way he said it frightened John, and

made him swallow before he spoke. He said, "I haven't heard anything. Nobody told me——"

"We could not communicate with you," the Vicar said gently, in a man-of-God voice, "because we did not know your address. And these dreadful events happening so suddenly. But, my boy, your mother. She is not at Vale Cottage. That is why I felt you must know as soon as you arrived. She has gone away by the orders of the doctor."

John said, "Where?" The Vicar did mean to be kind, but vicars are taught not to come to the point.

"Where?"

"My boy, to a nursing home at Bristol. It was thought better. She—these sudden events no doubt preyed on her mind——"

John only heard the first few words of the sentence for the moment. Nursing homes mean operations. People do have operations, but not people John knew. An odd feeling came over the skin of his body—the feeling that does comes when people talk of operations. But it was only momentary; immediately afterwards he picked up the Vicar's thread.

"—better to have perfect rest. Not unhinged, I must tell you—not unhinged. Nothing to be alarmed about."

And then he knew where the Vicar was driving. Mummy had gone mad.

Nothing happened. He went on walking down the hill, listening to the Vicar. His brain was working quite clearly. Mummy had gone mad, and they had taken her away, and he was to put his things together and come down to the Vicarage. Laura was at Vale Cottage. He was to go in and arrange things with her, and afterwards follow the Vicar to the Vicarage.

Laura was looking out of the drawing-room window. She came out to meet John in the hall.

"Oh, Master John, isn't it awful? Poor Madam. I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't have been for the Vicar. We didn't know where you was."

John's mind said, "Hadn't have been." Hadn't have been is wrong; only you cannot see what it ought to be. He let Laura go on.

"I thought Madam was very silent the day you went away. But then she often seems thoughtful. It is no part of my duties to make remarks." Laura must have been enjoying herself here. "Then the day after you went, that lady came to call, the Honourable Lady Tallyntyres—"

John's mind said, "Oh, she *did* come. She did come and ask Mummy about Shropshire. I wonder if she made her come."

"—who stayed a good long time, and I thought she must have tired Mistress, for Mistress seemed very quiet and tired that evening, I thought. Late that evening I went in with the coffee—you know she likes coffee late—and she was writing something, and I couldn't be sure but I thought I heard her talking to herself. I said nothing of course, but I noticed that she looked to me hot and flushed. I heard her go to bed late, and the next morning when I took in her hot water she was still sitting up in bed writing and talking. Oh, Mr John, she was queer; I didn't know what to do with her. I hoped you would understand, me going down to the Vicar later in the day, not from a wish to talk about your private affairs—"

John said, "It's all right." Then, before Laura had taken breath to go on, "What was she talking about?"

"Oh, funny things, Mr John, very low, places and

people, and I heard something about a boy. When I spoke to her she would answer, but she would immediately commence again talking to herself. But it was not till after—The Vicar said—I tried to do right, Mr John, I tried to do as she would wish me——”

Laura's aggressive gentility was trying. But Mummy. Mummy sitting up in bed writing and talking in a low voice about a boy. It was like something bad in a novel—not Mummy and John at Vale Cottage, Lyncombe. And they had taken Mummy away.

He went into Mummy's room. It was very much as usual, except that the brushes and combs were gone, the ebony brushes with the silver monogram S. M. Mummy liked ebony better than silver. His own photograph still stood on the dressing-table; rather a stupid photograph, looking three-quarterways out of the frame. He had never liked it. There was nothing else on the dressing-table except an empty frame, thrown down as if the photograph had been quickly taken out of it. The piece of paper that you stuff in behind the photograph had fallen out. John picked it up, but there was nothing on it but a date, 3rd April, 1899.

John did not know what had happened on 3rd April 1899. It was not his own birthday, for that came in July; and it was not May's, for that was in September 1897. And it was not Mummy's wedding day. He could not think of anything else, and put it back into the frame.

Later he went down to the Vicarage with a suitcase. There were no evening prayers, only family prayers before breakfast. Everyone was very kind, and talked about other things as if he could not bear it.

But he could bear it.

§

He could bear anything, even war and madness.

Even the thing they did not tell him the night he went to the Vicarage. That they had taken Mummy away because she had tried to kill herself.

He could bear this quite well, because it was quite incredible that Mummy had. Your own mother does not do these things. The dreams were much worse.

He had dreams every night. They were the only thing you minded really. Dreams of a flat waste country with nothing to see; and you were walking across it, and you knew, though you could not see them, that men were crawling along the waste land and hiding in the hollows. All through the dream you were waiting for a flash, and when it came you knew you would find the dead body of a man. Or else it was the dream of waiting under a hill, watching four men come towards you carrying a dead body. But you always woke up before you saw whose the dead body was; or else the dream changed and became something ordinary, like Laura filling a thermos flask or men making hay.

He had never seen the face of the dead body. But he knew well enough what he was afraid of. Ralph. It would mean that you would hear Ralph was dead; and that was ridiculous, for he had not even begun to train. But that did not diminish the horror. It was Ralph's live face that he knew so well turning into Ralph's dead one. Ralph's face with the dark raised brows and the curiously light blue eyes, and the chin thrust out and up, and the amused look. He could see it, as he had seen Ralph's sleeping face on Glastonbury Hill, only now it was dead, and the eyes were shut and

the amused look was gone, but still the chin was thrust out.

§

And one night he nearly saw it.

It was a dream that had begun ordinarily, and changed in the middle, as so many dreams did, to the dark country with the mounds covered with what you thought was dried heather. And first grey horses came galloping in, and then soldiers were carrying a dead man. They came close to John before he woke up; and he made himself wake because he could not bear to look. Only as he woke he knew that it was not Ralph at all.

It was Uncle Mush.

His hair was wet. This may have been because John's own hair was wet when he woke. Waking things do mix with real things.

But it was more terrible than Ralph, for Ralph might go out to die, but Uncle Mush was dead. He looked young and innocent, like Paul.

And you had never thought of Paul dead.

§

War and Madness. The Cherub training at Aldershot—joining Kitchener's army with the Snark—training to go out to Belgium to shoot German soldiers. . . . Mrs Grant letting Loriston furnished—going into lodgings at Aldershot to be near the boys. . . . Paul to live with Gilly and be in Lloyds Bank. . . . And Mummy in the nursing home, screaming and writing—stopping writing to scream and say things that they did not tell John.

And on the fifteenth of September John was to go to College as a boarder. He did not care. Loriston was gone anyhow, and Ralph and the Snark and Paul.

Suddenly, like leaves before a wind, they were all scattered. "To the wind's twelve quarters I take my endless way."

If you thought of it, it was almost funny. He took long walks on the moor and thought of it and many things.

One day he met the old man with the carrot cart, whom long ago he had met with Paul.

XXVI

TWO months later John and the Cherub stood on the headland looking at the sea. Up the Channel crept the little destroyers. You could not hear the guns. But John had heard them; the thud and boom driving the Germans back.

The Germans had nearly reached Paris.

Snark had been to Paris. He talked about the Bois and the Champs Elysées and the Arc de Triomphe with the seven avenues—the Cherub said it was twelve, and there had been an argument. Now you had to imagine the Germans besieging a place that people you knew had been to and argued over. It is impossible. It cannot be done. It was almost as though the Germans had tried to besiege Arming. But incredulous though you might be, you had heard that thud and boom.

The war had never been quite real. The terrible things in the papers were not real—pictures of Louvain destroyed, people with bundles trudging along roads, poor old people. . . . As if the villagers at Crowthorne or Withington had been burned out of their homes and come with their bundles into Arming—which is too absurd to be imagined. And as if you had walked along the Withington Road, and seen dead people in the ditches. Ridiculous.

Then there was Mons. Mons might have happened. It was not as impossible as Louvain, because two old College boys had been killed. Their names were in the first list. But Mons was a very long way off—as

far as the South Pole. You thought of Lynd and Barnwell-Gurney in the same way as you thought of Shackleton.

Then there was Ypres, and the Marne, and the Aisne, and the *Good Hope*, and Mummy in the nursing home. They were all about the same level of credibility. And Raemakers' cartoons and the atrocities. . . . And big headlines in the newspapers. But you went on in the same old way, except that you boarded at Merton House and there were tenants at Loriston. The corps drilled. The corps always had drilled. There was nothing different about that.

Then suddenly Ralph and Snark came back.

They were trained. They had rushed through the Special Reserve Battalion in two months. Many chaps did this—those who had done corps work at school—and went out to fill the gaps at Ypres and the other places one read of in the paper. Ralph's was to be the Sussex Regiment. To-morrow he would go to Richmond, and the next day it would be Richmond, and the day after that Newhaven, and then France.

They talked about France and Belgium, and the Sussex, and College, and Mrs Grant's new tenants.

"Quaint lot of bugs at Loriston. I saw them when I was wending by. . . . Ikey blood, I think. Wonder how long Mrs Grant'll let it for. Those rooms she's got aren't any great shakes. . . . I say, don't forget the glass. Make a note of it. Louvain glass, and Ypres Cloth Hall . . . Mps, I won't promise to cart home enough for your blasted fire-screen. You've got fire-screen on the brain. . . . And shells and things. And bullets. And Hun helmets. . . . Study of gentlemen arriving on leave hung round with Louvain glass and Hun helmets, I *don't*—"'

Then it rushed on John like waves of an overpowering sea. "What if you don't come back on leave?" Wordlessly he felt the same from Ralph. "What if I don't come back?"

It was the most horrible moment that had ever been, because they looked at each other and knew each other's thoughts. And the war became real, on the headland above the town—above the doll's town spread out below, dotted with its little trees and little houses and little people.

But Ralph was life size. He towered on the headland—Ralph in his dark beauty like a young god going out to fight.

But all these words sound foolish . . .

Then Ralph said, "We're both a bit unhinged. Come on."

They walked home.

THE END





